RIEL FAMILY: HOME AND LIFESTYLE AT ST-VITAL, 1860-1910
by Diane Payment
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Riel Family: Home and Lifestyle at St-Vital, 1860-1910

La Famille Riel: Résidence et Mode de Vie à St-Vital entre 1860 et 1910

by - par

Diane Payment

Parks Canada
Historical Research Division
Prairie Region
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Parcs Canada
Division de la recherche historique
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Part II: Riel Family and Lifestyle at St-Vital.

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Part I: Riel House: Land and Structural History

The object of this paper is to provide a review, and on the basis of supplementary evidence, suggest alternative interpretations of the documentary and structural evidence previously examined in the preparation of various studies on the Riel House and Family. The impending restoration of the house, the recurring doubts as to date of erection, and finally the conflicting and at times contradictory historical and architectural evidence, rendered indispensable a re-examination or re-assessment of the documentation. Currently, archaeological investigations conducted in 1976 offered some valuable insights into the site history which had to be integrated with the historical and architectural frame of reference. This paper will attempt to test the hypothesis of a later or ca. 1880 date of construction for the house. The Site Development Team also required additional information on building features and interpretive materials suggesting the lifestyle and character of the Riel family, particularly members who resided on lot 51 and inhabited the dwelling, up to the turn of the century. Hopefully, this paper will also provide a synthesis of previous historical studies.

It is difficult to document conclusively the place of residence of the Riel family between 1844 and 1864. There is strong evidence to suggest that Louis père and Julie Lagimodière first resided at the forks of the Red and Seine rivers, on the land of his father-in-law, Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière. Louis père operated a small carding mill for the Hudson's Bay Company at the junction of the two rivers around 1847. The venture was short-lived and ultimately unsuccessful. The Minutes of the Council of
Assiniboia confirmed the arrival of a fulling mill at York Factory in 1847. It seems, however, that Riel was unhappy with the terms of contract with the Company and soon dismantled his mill. According to one testimony:

... Quelques années après son mariage, Louis Riel fit un petit moulin à carder et sollicita l'encouragement de la baie d'Hudson pour cette invention... lui fit un accueil tellement froid qu'il renonça à son projet.

In late 1852, Louis Riel père reported to the council that the mill had not been in use for the last five years. But since he was about to erect a water mill, he wanted to purchase the buildings minus the iron fuller which he did not need. In a subsequent meeting on March 23, 1853, it was reported that Riel had offered £15 for the buildings. The Council agreed that he was to be paid £1 for removing the machinery from his property and provide surety for the balance to the satisfaction of councillor Abbé Laflèche. Concurrently, in September 1852, Riel père negotiated a £100 loan on his property, lot 756 (present-day Carrière Avenue in St-Vital), "to construct a mill dam and at the same time a grist mill." He was also given permission to "... form a canal 9 miles long to his mill amongst certain lots mentioned below [?] for yearly rent of 5/." The agreement stipulated a remittance of the sum in cash or produce within three years. The grist mill was in operation by 1854 and other evidence suggests the mortgage on lot 756 was lifted and transfer of 24 acres (mill site on lot 793?) occurred in the spring of 1855.

The location of this mill and family residence at the time is subject to some debate. There is evidence that Louis père's farm was inundated by the 1852 flood and that the family sought refuge with Mgr Taché. Stanley corroborates this by stating that when Louis fils was seven years of age (1851-1852),
... the family was in the process of moving, gave up their house [at the forks?] and, for a short period, lived in cramped quarters in the Bishop's house until they were able to obtain accommodation from Prospère Ducharme. But, according to Stanley, the family soon returned to the Lagimodière property. Father Antoine Champagne and M. Marius Benoit have stated that by 1853, the Riel family made their home on lot 793. This hypothesis is supported by family tradition and testimonies. An obituary and account on Eulalie Riel-Gladu in 1931 stated that Mme Gladu had told her family that she was born [1853] in a house on La Giclais (vicinity of present-day Sterling Avenue and the general area of the mill site on lot 793. This testimony weakens the hypothesis of a residence on lot 793. An 1873 account held that when Riel père's first milling activity began to flounder, "il se livra alors à la culture d'une terre dont il avait fait l'acquisition sur les bords de la petite rivière la Seine en arrière de St-Boniface" (presumably lot 756 in the 'outskirts' of the parish). No mention is made of the family's place of residence. There is no documentary evidence of a dwelling at that site, nor would I contend of a grist mill. There is evidence, however, to suggest that Riel's grist mill was indeed located on lot 793, and that the family moved there around 1853. First, there is an account in the Annales des Soeurs Grises in 1855 which refers to daily excursions to Riel père's distant mill site to card some wool:

Notre chère Mère Valade fit des démarches auprès de M. Riel pour qu'il ajustât notre machine [à carder la laine] à son pouvoir d'eau. Ce bon Monsieur y consentit volontiers et n'épargna ni son temps ni ses peines pour nous rendre ce service. Mais comme il lui était impossible d'être cardeur et meunier en même temps, notre chère Soeur Cusson se dévoua à devenir cardeuse. Par conséquent cette infatigable Soeur se rendait en voiture au moulin de M. Louis Riel ... elles revenaient tous les soirs pour repartir tous les matins [emphasis mine].
Secondly, there are the Surveyors' field notes on 1871 and 1873 surveys along the Red and Seine rivers in the parish of St-Vital. G. McPhillips confirmed the presence of a house and outbuildings on the Red River or western boundary of lot 51 by 1871. He also noted a house, stable, fencing and a cultivated field at the eastern or Seine River portion of lot 50, a parcel of lot 51, originally lots 793 and 794 under the Hudson's Bay Company survey (see figure 1). It was the only lot along the Seine which reported human activity or remains of such. The land along both banks of the Seine was described as largely "swamp and low, wet, hay land," which probably accounted for the absence of farming inhabitants. But more important was McPhillips' traverse of the west bank of the Seine River (figure 2). Although difficult to interpret, the sketch does note an "old mill race and pond" within the boundaries of lots 49, 50 and 51, fairly conclusive evidence of a milling activity in the area.

Some difficulty presents itself in the recorded occupation of lots 793 and 794. A fifty acre parcel of lot 793 (northern eight chains or 169 acres of later lot 51) was claimed and settled by Pierre Parenteau between 1835 and 1849. It is not known if he resided on the Seine or Red river although archaeological investigations in the vicinity of extant Riel home have tentatively confirmed the presence of a ca. 1850 structure. In 1849, François Gendron acquired the whole of lot 793. Around 1860, he sold a 24 acre parcel of the lot (identified as lot 50 under the post-1870 surveys) to Benjamin Lagimodière, Riel père's brother-in-law. According to a declaration by Joseph Riel to substantiate Mme Julie's claim in 1891:
... this land was first of all owned by François Gendron who sold it in the year about 1862 to Benjamin Lagimodière, as it was the custom of this country at that time, by verbal agreement. It was 24 acres at the south east end of François Gendron's lot touching the Seine River where Benjamin Lagimodière built a water mill to grind wheat into flour by water power which he got by damming the Seine River, where Lagimodière also built a good house, storehouse and stables and farmed said land [emphasis mine]...

Other sources also confirm Benjamin Lagimodière's ownership of the 24 acre parcel upon the transfer of the rest of the lot (approximately 145 acres) to Joseph Landry on February 29, 1864. But there was no reference to Louis Riel's claim, milling activities or residence on the property in his son's declaration. Was it perhaps not mentioned because the declarants wanted only to substantiate Lagimodière the previous owner's claim? Few people possibly remembered by that time (1891) that Riel pére and Lagimodière had been in association. But was this the same grist mill that Riel erected in 1853-54? One possible explanation is that Riel had made some unrecorded arrangement with Gendron who occupied the Red River frontage. Another hypothesis is that when Riel pére left for Montréal to purchase a carding mill in 1857, Lagimodière took over the grist mill. Both families may have resided together, a common practice at the time. The 1873 Surveyor's sketch of lot 50 (Figure 1) noted a number of buildings at that site. There may have been two dwellings at one time. Family correspondence in the 1870's and 1880's also attests to the close relationship and prolonged sojourns of Julie's brothers and sisters to her home. An 1873 published account on Louis pére, written by a contemporary of Louis fils, Joseph Tassé, supports the above hypothesis. A Québec journalist and
politician, he would have obtained his information from friends like Royal, Dubuc and perhaps even Louis fils. Although his account is an eulogy of Riel père and particularly critical of the Hudson's Bay Company's administrative and commercial policies, it is nevertheless close enough to the events to have some credibility.

Tassé corroborates Riel père's association with Lagimodière on lot 50:

... il conçut le projet de construire un moulin à farine ... Ce moulin existe encore. Il est situé à trois ou quatre milles de St-Boniface et appartient maintenant à M. de Lagimodière, beau-frère de Riel [emphasis mine].

There are also the unexplained references to a Lagimodière mill in Hudson's Bay Company correspondence in the late 1850's. Finally, in 1949, millstones were unearthed on Bruce Road, the general area of the mill site, on lot 50. They were identified as "The Miller of the Seine's millstones," undoubtedly those of the grist mill erected by Riel or Lagimodière or both.

Riel père's grist mill was considered quite an engineering achievement for its time. In order to harness sufficient water power, he dug a canal to link the Seine to another water-way, twelve miles to the east. The stream, "une petite rivière portant le nom peu pittoresque de rivière à la Graisse," enabled him to operate his mill throughout the summer or during periods of relative drought. The enterprise was, on the whole, quite successful. Riel père's accounts with the Hudson's Bay Company between 1853 and 1863 suggest that although he was in debt to the Company, his balance compared favourably with other larger entrepreneurs or traders. A letter to Mgr Taché in 1862 suggested comparatively adequate circumstances:
Supplementing this income with subsistence farming and perhaps some trading across the border, the Riels probably maintained a satisfactory standard of living. Riel père's third milling enterprise was less successful. In 1857, he entered into a partnership with Henry Fisher and three others and was delegated to travel to Montréal to purchase equipment for a carding mill. It was on his return trip with the bulky machinery in 1858 that he last met his eldest son Louis. The ambitious milling venture was plagued with difficulties from the beginning. The group had more enthusiasm than capital or business acumen. There was reportedly little demand for locally manufactured cloth in the colony. It is doubtful, however, that the mill was ever set up or went into operation. Specific evidence is lacking but according to one testimony "... l'entreprise échoua au moment où le succès semblait assuré."

At the time of Louis Riel père's death in January 1864, the family resided on part of lot 793 or the mill site in St-Vital. Soon after, ca. 1864-67, Julie Lagimodière-Riel and the eight children moved to the Red River frontage of the same lot which was given to her or purchased from Mgr Taché. It would appear that anxious for the Riel family's security and well-being, and perhaps also because of some previous agreement with the late Riel, Mgr Taché had purchased lot 793 from Joseph Landry for Mme Riel. According to Register 'B' and declarations regarding lot 793 (part of lot 51 after
1870), Gendron's occupation was sporadic and probably did not extend beyond the early 1850's, to be followed by Landry. Both, it would appear, were living on the western end of the lot or the vicinity of the extant Riel house.

In 1868, Benjamin Lagimodière, who resided on the 24 acre parcel of lot 793, moved to Rivière aux Rats (St-Pierre-Jolys) and gave his claim to his son-in-law, Edouard Ellémont, commonly known as Bodé. Bodé and family resided on the land until 1871. According to Roger Goulet, Lagimodière had on the lot a water mill ... a good house, stables, store and good field ... although he did not give deed to his son-in-law Ellémont, I know for a fact he had verbally given it to him before 1870 ... and lived on it until he sold it in 1871 to widow Julie Riel. This was corroborated by Joseph Riel who declared "... in 1871, Edouard Ellémont verbally sold the said 24 acres now this no. 50 to my mother Julie Riel ... as said before there was no deed ... it was a verbal agreement..." The buildings on the lot were most probably the ones reported in the 1873 survey (see figure 1). We thus have Mme Riel confirmed in her possession of the northern eight chains of lot 51 (formerly 793) between the Seine and the Red by 1871.

The ever present question, however, and source of much debate is whether the surviving house is the one the family moved into around 1867. On the basis of documentary, archaeological and architectural evidence, it is more reasonable to suggest that it was "a little house at the back" or some other structure. With her young family, limited income and no source of labour to construct a house, she would have made use of any existing house, perhaps Landry's. In 1868, the Red River Settlement suffered a severe grasshopper plague, which, aggravated by years of drought, brought famine and hardship. The distress did
not spare the Riels family. According to a report of
the parish of St-Vital by the Executive Relief Committee,
the Riels had sown no crops in the last two years while
usually they planted fifteen bushels.40 "Durant le
printemps de 1869, le comité de secours prêta douze
minots de blé de semence [à la famille]. Sur les douze
minots, neuf seulement produisirent."41 They had some
cattle which permitted a meagre existence, but their
economic circumstances hardly suggest the construction of
a new house. Louis fils returned home42 to farm that
summer and assumed the support of the young family. He
later recalled they refused offers of meat, declaring
that they could manage although they had difficulty
obtaining bread. The following winter Louis and the
family also returned the twelve bushels of seed grain
advance to the committee.43

Archaeological investigations at the site in 1976
provided some insight into structures and activities in
the immediate area of the extant house. The testing
confirmed the presence of two previous structures (residence), structure 1 generally corresponding to the
Parenteau phase (ca. 1835-1845) and structure 2 to the
Gendron (ca. 1849-1855) or Landry phase (ca. 1855-1864)
(see figure 3). Although it was impossible to establish
an exact period of occupancy and date of backfilling with
only a preliminary analysis of artifacts, it was concluded
that structure 1 was dismantled before 1850 and structure
2 after 1866. Some of the glassware samples from the
cellar of structure 2 dated as late as the 1870's.44

Based on historical evidence or interpretation which
precluded a ca. 1868 date of erection for the extant
Riel house, Forsman did not pursue the hypothesis of
a post-1870 activity at site 2. But he did conclude that
the structure was probably still standing on the site when
Julie (Lagimodièrè) Riel took up residence there. A further cursory examination of the artifacts in the spring of 1979 concluded that "the origins of the fill layers and significance of dates obtained require further analysis before conclusions can be reached." Recently completed artifact research has resulted in a number of revisions to the dating of structures by Forsman. The re-analysis has established that cellar filling for structure 1, the earliest known building at the site, extended beyond 1850, and up to the 1880s. Consequently structure 1 could have been associated with Parenteau, Gendron and/or Landry. Artifact data on structure 2 suggested that it was standing in the 1870s although not after the early 1880s. On that basis it was concluded that structure 2 was indeed associated with the Riel family or was the first Riel home at the site. It was also noted that the use of cut nails and not wire nails in the construction and later modifications of the extant house suggests an early 1880s date of construction.

In 1871, A.V. Baudry surveyed the Red River portion of lot 51 and measured the buildings on the site (see figure 4). Julie Riel was reported in residence on the northern eight chains of the lot, in a dwelling relatively in the same location as the present structure. The buildings were measured in chains "... j'ai mesuré aussi, exactement les maisons et les bâtiments des propriétaires qui les occupent eux-mêmes," although the degree of accuracy is uncertain. The .25 x .40 dwelling and another .20 x .20 structure on the southern four chains correspond roughly to 5.05 (E-W) x 8.10 (N-S) metres and 4.05 x 4.05 metres. The dimensions of the 1871 dwelling vary somewhat with the 6.15 x 8 metres (as found) extant structure (excluding annex). In fact, the 1871 'Baudry' house dimensions correspond more closely to those of structure 2, south-east of the house (see figure 3). Structure 2 had a full addition along the north wall for a total area of approximately 4.92 (E-W) x 8.62 (N-S) metres. An 1871 account in Le Métis corroborated an annex. In 1875, Mme Riel made a declaration for title of her land, lot 51 (formerly 793 and 794; the southern four chains of lot 794 having been purchased by Louis Riel from François Larivièrè in 1869).
Lot situé dans St-Vital, borné au sud par la propriété de Charles Neault et au nord par la terre de Suzanne Marie Sauvé née Dease. Cette terre a 12 chaines de largeur, je la possède depuis près de 10 ans ... il y a une bâtisse et d'autres dépendances dessus et un demi mille de défrichés sur la longueur et toute la largeur, le tout renfermé par une clôture.50

Her son Louis being absent and having vested all his lands or interests in her explains why Mme Julie was applying for title to the 12 chains. Corroborating witnesses claimed that she had occupied the lands for more than 10 years and moreover that she had purchased lot 16 (on the west bank of the Red River) from François Marion.51

The Homestead and Lands Branch records provide further insight into the claims, buildings and activities of Louis Riel and family on lots 50 and 51 between 1870 and 1895. For the 1870's, more specifically, they confirm Louis Riel's claim to the southern four chains of lot 51 and other purchased lands 'by his mother' in consequence of his absence and banishment from the province. As elder son, he was also considered rightful heir to the family residence with the understanding that some land would be shared with his brothers.

Lot 794, later the southern four chains of lot 51 (84 acres), was not part of the original family claim. According to Register 'B' and the Red River Settlement censuses, it was first claimed by Charles Beauchamp and in 1849 by Antoine Desjardins.52 According to a declaration by André Beauchemin in 1879 to corroborate Louis Lavallée's claim:
I have known lot for 25 years [1854]. At first owned and occupied by one Desjardins who about 16 years ago [1863] sold it to François Larivière. The said Larivière occupied it for about 6 years and in 1869 sold it to Louis Riel. Louis Riel occupied it by his mother until sold to above [Louis Lavallée]. There were on July 15, 1870 and are still on said land, a house, a stable and about 10 acres under cultivation.

Because the transaction between Riel and Larivière had not been recorded, Larivière was obliged to sign a quit claim deed to allow transfer to Lavallée in 1879. According to a declaration by Larivière now living in Ste-Agathe:

... The said Louis Riel peaceably possessed and occupied the said land prior to and on 15 July, 1870 [as of January 1, 1869] and continued after that date to possess and occupy the same by his mother until he transferred it to above-named applicant [Louis Lavallée].

An important aspect of this evidence is Louis Riel's direct association with and possible residence in a house on the southern four chains of lot 51 between 1869 and the time of his final departure from the settlement in 1873. It may be the building recorded in Baudry's notebook, which appears on an 1871 map. Larivière's house, however, would have been replaced or used as an outbuilding by 1875. When Louison Lavallée, Riel's brother-in-law, decided to move from St-François-Xavier to St-Vital in late 1875, there was no suitable housing and the young family (consisting of himself, Octavie and daughter Marie) resided with Mme Riel. At first, Mme Riel hesitated to sell him Louis' land, claiming

Dans ce temps là j'espérais que le temps de ton exile écoulé, tu reviendrais au milieu de nous. Pour cette raison j'ai donné la terre à mon gendre, à condition que tu puisses à ton arrivée faire toi-même des arrangements avec lui. A présent tu me dis que tu penses ne plus jamais revenir à la Rivière Rouge ... Ton beau-frère travaille sur la terre en attendant une réponse ...
Louis' permission was soon given and in the fall of 1878, Lavallée was building a home. "... Louison est à se bâtir de ce temps ci sur sa terre voisine de la nôtre. Il est bien avancé. Elle sera finie dans une quinzaine de jours." The Lavallées resided on the property until about 1890 and were operating a store at the site. The family commuted between St-François-Xavier and St-Vital, often wintering at the former, particularly following the death of his father Pierre Lavallée in 1879. During the winter of 1879-80, the house was rented to Peter Sauvé, a local carpenter and trader. But between ca. 1884-1890, Louison and Octavie resided on the southern portion of lot 51 in St-Vital. Lavallée later farmed in the vicinity of lots 49-50 on Ste-Anne's Road (house at 569) where the family resided until the 1960's. Another daughter Henriette, who married Jean-Marie Poitras in 1883, also resided on lot 51 in the 1890's.

In June 1884, Julie Riel finally received patent for lot 51. After encountering many bureaucratic entanglements due to her transfer of the southern four chains to Lavallée, and having obtained power of attorney from Louis, it was decided that she alone would apply for title to the 232 acre lot. In December 1884, Mme Riel signed a deed transferring the northern four chains of lot 51 to her son Joseph, and in January 1885, a parcel of lot 51 and the southern four chains of lot 50 (11 acres of the 24 acre lot) were transferred to Alexandre. In 1886, son-in-law Lavallée was still in residence on the southern four chains, but the property was plagued
by mortgages. That portion of the lot was lost around that time, and by 1890, Lavallée was living at St-Malo. In 1893, however, Poitras was farming on lot 51 near the Riel home where he resided until the turn of the century (see figure 5).

Similarly, previous transfers by Mme Riel regarding lot 50 were subject to verification when Alexandre applied for patent in 1891. The 'verbal agreement' with nephew Bodé had to be registered as well as a quit claim to Alexandre. On January 1, 1892, Mme Riel obtained title to the northerly four chains (13 acres) of lot 50 and on March 24, Alexandre's ownership of the southerly four chains was confirmed (see figure 5).

The date of construction of Alexandre's house on lot 50 (see figure 6) is estimated around 1892. According to an 1891 declaration, "... nobody now lives on this lot, all the houses [Bodé's] and other improvements done before on said lot are all gone ..." Alexandre's postal address during the winter of 1891 was St-Malo. It would seem, therefore, that immediately after his marriage in 1881, he resided with his mother and then at St-Malo before establishing residence on lot 50 in St-Vital.

The history of the Riel family home or River Road dwelling in the 1870's is largely conjectural, although historical and architectural evidence almost confirm a ca. 1880 date of construction or 'reconstruction' for the extant house. Family tradition points out to the present home as being built ca. 1867-68, and as the site of Louis' residence while in St-Vital in the early 1870's. But most of these testimonies were second generation and do not necessarily contradict the present hypothesis since the 1870's house was in the same location or in the
immediate vicinity. Materials from that building may also have been incorporated into the later structure. Whatever house now exists on River Road, it was directly associated with Louis Riel and his family.

Among some illusions it is important to dispel about Métis homes in the 1860's is that they were all primitive, roughly assembled and poorly maintained. A trader and hunter who would look to the Red River Settlement as only a pied à terre would naturally attach less importance to embellishments. But many Canadien and Métis families established at Red River (St-Boniface and St-Vital for example) were as sophisticated as any other frontier settlers. By the 1860's, manufactured articles and furniture from eastern Canada and the United States were readily available to local merchants via St-Paul and Pembina. For building, good oak was available at Pointe des Chênes and at the 'points' along the Red River. There is also some evidence that a circular saw was purchased by the mission of St-Boniface in the mid-1860's. In 1863, Father Lestanc asked Mgr Taché to purchase a saw in Montréal.

... Mgr si vous voulez avoir la bonté de nous le [là] procurer ... avec ses agrès, strapè en caoutchouc ... nous désirons que la scie soit forte pour l'épaisseur et pour la grandeur qu'elle puisse faire des planches de 9 à 10 pouces de largeur.

In 1871, Joseph Lemay operated a sawmill at St-Norbert and another mill was in operation at Pointe des Chênes in the early 1870's. In 1871, Le Métis carried advertisements for fine imported household furniture at Victor Beaupré's. A.G.B. Bannatyne and James Ashdown advertised an extensive variety of farm instruments, stoves, construction tools, china and utensils as well as foodstuffs. The family had an account at Boudreau's and Foucher's, General Merchants in St-Boniface. Religious articles, books and paper goods were purchased at La Librairie Catholique which opened in 1873. Local newspapers advertised items such as a
Wanzer sewing machine in the early 1870's.

Evidence on the Riel home and lifestyle in the 1870's attests to humble lodgings and limited financial resources but in an atmosphere of solidarity, resourcefulness and self-sufficiency. The main preoccupation of the young family in the 1870's was subsisting. Charles (Meunier) was engaged as a labourer and young Joseph farmed the land and raised cattle, with the occasional help of a hired hand and near-by friends and relatives, particularly Paul Proulx, the Sauvés, the Lagimodières and the Naults. Mme Julie and daughters Octavie and Eulalie, who interrupted their studies at the convent of the Grey Nuns to assist their mother in the household, were gardening, sewing and performing tasks enabling the family to maintain a reasonable standard of living. The 1870's were generally bad years for crops and business. "L'argent est ce que nos gens appellent farouche [rare]... Les marchands sont démontés, ils font presque rien. Le grain ne se vend pas non plus ..." There were alternating periods of drought and flood. Winters were harsh. In exile, Louis was unable to provide directly for the family although the responsibility weighed heavily on him. There were a few occasions when the family had to accept charity or count on the generosity of benefactors. There are few references to the family dwelling in the 1870's and none give details on the structures. An 1871 account by Sister Sara, during Mme Julie's absence to visit Louis at St-Joe, provides some evidence on interior furnishings and outbuildings.

Joseph est chez Paul [Proulx]. Il va faire du feu tous les jours pour ne pas laisser le froid s'enfermer dans la maison ... J'y suis allé hier soir après mon école [elle enseignait à St-Vital] avec notre petit frère [Alexandre]. La maison était telle que maman l'avait laissée, tout
était pas placé ... j'ai pu en foulant faire tout tenir dans la cassette bleue tout ce qui était dans le gros coffre ... Je vais faire poser une serrure au coffre. Tout ce qu'il y a au grenier de propre bien plié tiendra dedans ... la vaisselle tiendra dans une tablette de l'armoire, le reste du butin plié tiendra dans ces autres tablettes. Je garderai la clef de l'armoire sur moi. Comme les vivres ne sont pas en sûreté, Joseph les charrira cet après-midi dans le hangar de Charles [Sauvé]...

Imagines-toi que Joseph avait balayé pour tirer son chagrin et avait fourré les salopries sous le poêle ... le petit chien d'Alexandre est rendu chez Paul ... [emphasis mine].

It would be reasonable to extrapolate from the above evidence that the garret or upstairs was being used, probably for sleeping quarters, that the house was sparsely furnished and that there were few if any outbuildings for storing goods since they had to be transported to a neighbour's. Other evidence confirms the presence of a stable and fencing, "une clôture de perches," in the 1870's. The only reference in the Riel papers to the exterior of the house is a mention of a new roof and the erection of an outbuilding: "On se prépare à faire couvrir la maison et à faire couper un hangar ces jours ci."

Many family photographs and religious articles decorated the home. Shortly after Marie's death in 1873, Sr Sara returned several photographs [?] to her mother, requesting other portraits of the family, particularly one to replace Louis' which she had lost on her journey to Ile à la Crosse.

Je vous envoie par cette occasion le portrait de notre bien-aimée et regretée Marie, comme je sais que vous m'aviez donné tous ceux que vous aviez ... en retour quand vous ferez tirer vos portraits, envoyez m'en chacun un exemplaire -- surtout de notre cher et bien-aimé Louis. Notre-Seigneur qui voyait combien ce portrait m'était cher me le fit perdre dans les prairies. Je le tenais avec celui de maman dans ma poche.
Shortly after, concerned about sickness in the family, Sr Sara forwarded several relics, scapulars, religious pictures and medals, among which a medal of the "Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie Alacoque pour ma chère maman." 

Louis was also sending gifts to the home, particularly paintings or pictures for the walls. In a letter of acknowledgement, Marie replied:

... Je t'assure que tes beaux présents ont causé un bien grand bonheur à notre chère maman. Quels beaux tableaux mais nous les suspendrons au mur qu'à ton retour [emphasis mine].

Louis had a shotgun with its own box, une carabine à deux coups which he gave to his brother Joseph in 1878. There was some talk of sending it down to Keeseville as a gift to Louis' benefactor, Father Fabien Barnabé, but it appears this was not carried out.

The most detailed information is the farm and garden activity, the main source of livelihood for the family. Louis often reminded the family "... [que] c'est dans une bonne récolte que nous trouvons le moyen de vivre." Among the major crops were oats, wheat, barley, hay, peas, turnips, carrots and potatoes. Pigs and cows and possibly sheep provided milk and meat. There is evidence the family was making butter, baking bread, gathering berries and the sap of Manitoba maples for sugar. Mme Julie was also quite adept at weaving and needlework, particularly embroidery.

In order to assist the family and in an attempt to provide some income for himself, Louis Riel endeavoured to sell his lands in St-Boniface, St-Vital and Pointe à Grouette (Ste-Agathe) in the mid-1870's. To this effect,
he journeyed to Pembina and St-Joe where he spent the winter of 1878 and the spring and summer of 1879. It is highly probable that he crossed the border into Manitoba during this time or before his departure for Dakota and Montana. In February 1878, he had written to his mother from Keeseville, New York, advising her that

... la terre qui vient de Bodé [lot 50] vous pouvez la vendre ... disposer de toutes mes terres ... Je suis déterminé à aller m'établir sur une terre dans l'ouest des Etats-Unis. Pour cela j'aurais besoin un peu d'argent ... Je vous ai tout donné ce que j'avais. Si vous avez reçu les lettres où je vous passais ainsi tout ce que je pouvais avoir à la Rivière Rouge [pouvoir de procuration], je ne veux rien changer à cela ... mais si vous voulez bien revenir sur cette volonté ... consentiez à vendre la terre de la pointe à Grouette, la moitié de la terre qui est situé près de celle de Daniel Carrière [lot 103 à St-Boniface], vous me ferez grand bien. 81

Although the lands were valuable, money was scarce and the sales were not profitable. In 1875, part of the lot at Ste-Agathe was sold to A.G.B. Bannatyne but he could not be persuaded to buy the rest. As for all land sales made à la mode du pays, the Land Titles Office required declarations by all previous occupants, a procedure which slowed down all transactions and demonstrated little respect for Métis custom. The lot at St-Boniface was sold at a loss in 1881 and the sale of the Pointe à Grouette land to Savoyard remained uncertain after two unsuccessful purchase attempts by Delorme and Berthelet. 82

But it is Bodé's land, also part of Louis' inheritance, that provides the most insight into the family residence and lifestyle in the 1880's. As previously discussed, Benjamin Lagimodière, brother of Julie Riel, was the registered owner of lot 50. Around 1867, he sold the land to his son-in-law Edouard Ellémont, or Bodé. In
1871, Bodé sold the land to his aunt Julie. An 1891 declaration by Joseph Riel and surveyor Roger Goulet confirmed that Lagimodière originally had a house and outbuildings on the land. But Joseph's statement noted specifically, "nobody now [1891] lives on this lot [50], all the houses and other improvements done before on said lot are all gone ..." [emphasis mine]. Correspondence in the Riel Papers, combined with evidence from the architectural analysis of the house on River Road suggest that around 1879, Bodé's house on the Seine River was moved to the River Road location and rebuilt in 1880-81.

It is not known where the family would have been residing in the meantime, perhaps in the former Landry dwelling located south-east of the present house (see figure 3) or with the Lavallées who lived nearby on the southern four chains of lot 51.

In 1877, Mme Julie wrote to Louis:

... Pour la terre de Bodé, comme on te l'a déjà dit, qu'on avait dessein de la vendre trois cent piastres. Mais celui qui veut l'acheter offre 100 piastres de plus ... il en a grande envie de l'avoir ... Mais nous ne voulions pas rien faire avant de savoir ton opinion là-dessus. Tâche de nous rendre une réponse au plus vite.

Louis replied shortly after: "Faites ce que vous trouverez bon de la maison qui vient de Body [sic]."

But the family was hesitant and somehow upset over the possible sale of the land. Mme Julie wrote to Louis in early 1878, "... Pour la terre chez Bodé nous étions pour la vendre mais maintenant nous ne savons si nous allons la vendre. Pourquoi demandes-tu si elle l'est?"

Why the unusual concern over this land? Was it perhaps because it was a former residence of the Riel family, where they had moved to around 1853 or lived in before
re-locating on the present River Road site in 1864?\textsuperscript{88}
This question remains unanswered but contrary to the express wishes to dispose of many lands in these times of need, the Riel family wanted to keep this land and preserve the house that stood on it. In March 1878, the family again wrote about Bodé's land and house:

... il me vient une autre idée sur la terre et la maison de Body. J'aimerais bien mieux que ce soit toi-même qui déciderais cela. Dis-moi ce que tu aimerais le mieux. Ou bien que je vende et à quel prix, ou bien que je la laisse là et comme elle est, ou bien que je la transporte ici et que je la bâtisse \textit{[emphasis mine]'}.\textsuperscript{89}

The family was evidently considering moving the house and rebuilding it, and Louis agreed with the plan.

... Fais-en [de la maison qui vient de Body] ce que tu voudras: transporte-la, si tu crois qu'elle vous sera plus utile sur la grande rivière [la Rouge]. En effet la maison doit avoir besoin d'être renouvelée...\textsuperscript{90}

Louis returned to the American North-West during the winter of 1878, more specifically to St-Joe. He stayed with the Martineau and Gingras families and received frequent visits from his family across the border. He continued to correspond with Joseph while in Montana, expressing renewed concerns about the land and home in St-Vital. He wrote:

Je voudrais bien que vous demandiez à l'archevêque les papiers de la terre de maman à St-Vital... Si Monseigneur [Taché] ne veut pas laisser cette terre à la famille, pourquoi y faire des frais inutiles.\textsuperscript{91}

This suggests that the family was making some changes to the property. Although not completely documented, it would appear that the Bodé house was indeed moved. In April 1880, Joseph wrote to Louis "... Je n'ai pu faire aucun ouvrage à la maison. L'argent est si rare et le bois si cher."\textsuperscript{92} In August, he reported that the house was started.
By June of the same year, Joseph must have been roofing the house as he received the following reply to a request for shingles from his cousin, André Nault:

... Pour le bardeau que tu me demandes je ne sais pas si je pourrai tout te le donner. Tu peux aller voir chez Monsieur Fidèle Mondor [à St-Boniface]. J'en avais encore cinq milles et demie il y a quelques semaines s'il ne l'a pas tout vendu. Tu pourras le prendre en lui demandant, et le reste je te le donnerai chez-nous [à Pointe des Chênes] ...

In August of 1881, Joseph again reported to Louis on the progress of the house, "... J'ai fait travailler à la maison. Elle est presque achevée." This is the last documentary reference to the house. A woodcut of the Riel house appeared in Poésies religieuses et politiques, a collection of Louis' poems published in Montréal in early 1886 (see figure 7). Except for a reverse east-west orientation in the printing, the sketch is undoubtedly the present house.

There are many other good arguments in favour of a new home in 1880-81. The Riel family was growing. Alexandre married in 1881 and continued to reside with his mother at least intermittently until ca. 1890. Joseph had tentative marriage plans since 1878 although he did not marry until 1884. Louis decided not to return to Manitoba and established himself in the American West in 1879. Although there was talk of the whole family joining him, l'amour du pays prevailed. Inheritance and management of the Riel homestead passed on to the second son Joseph who undertook the improvement and consolidation of the Riel family holdings.
There is only scant reference to the exterior of the Riel home in articles published in the Winnipeg Sun, Manitoba Free Press, and Le Manitoba in 1885. It was simply referred to as "a square house with a yard about it ... the door [front] faces the river about 600 yards distant ...." There was also mention of a staircase which led to the garret above and a little back kitchen [probably the annex]. But contemporary accounts and photographs provide comparative evidence on Métis or Canadien homes and farmsteads. On the basis of the architectural analysis of the house, we know it was of horizontal and framed pièce sur pièce log construction, the preferred method for constructing wooden houses in central New France (Québec) by the 18th century. The technique of pièce sur pièce with assemblage à tenon en coulisse (tongue in groove) was introduced to the (Canadian) North West by the Canadien employees of the fur trading companies. In Manitoba, it was naturalized as 'Red River Frame.' The Riel house rested on a field stone foundation, the spaces between the logs were filled or 'chinked,' and as most permanent dwellings by the late 1870's, the house was sided. A description of Pierre Delorme's farm at St-Norbert in 1876, although undoubtedly more substantial, revealed a comparable setting:

... His house is a model of the better class of Métis -- a story and a half high, of logs, but clap-boarded without, having a large sitting-room ... dining-room, little parlour and bedrooms. A table, chest of drawers, sewing machine, and half a dozen chairs with seats of wood or shagynappi, and box-stove are in the reception-room, into which the outer door opens direct ... has cows, log barns and great stacks of hay ... a grade Bull from the States ... raises cattle ... has a dozen sheep ... plenty of small fruit; he also planted some apple trees in a place sheltered with poplars ... good potatoes and onions were in the garden.
Features of a Canadien homestead such as the summer kitchen or dépense for storing provisions during the winter, the hangar à bois, perhaps several remises for storing farm implements and the stable-granary at the rear were present at the Riel home. According to French-Canadian custom, the annex or summer kitchen was usually erected on the north-east corner of the main building.

La cuisine d'été ou le fournil était une petite pièce intégrée au corps principal du logis. C'était une petite construction au coin nord-est de la maison et servant aussi de garde-manger et de lieu pour conserver les produits laitiers pendant l'hiver [dépense].

These outbuildings were most often of rough log (picket) or light frame and board construction. The annex may have contained a bake-oven or certainly a cook stove. There was probably a root cellar or caveau in the house, accessible by a trap door on the main floor. At the rear of the house, usually between the dwelling and the farm buildings, stood the Catherine or palais de Ponce-Pilate. Other features of a farmstead often included a tambour or removable winter porch. In the case of Riel house, it would appear to have been a double door at the front entrance and probably increased access by the south-east annex entrance during the winter.

Photographs of contemporary Métis homes offer comparative construction detail and suggest landscape features which may have been present at the Riel home (see figures 8 to 13):

Figure 8
Métis home in St-Albert (NWT), Alberta district, turn of the century.
The house is a pièce sur pièce or horizontal log with dovetail corners. It is 'chinked' and unsided and probably whitewashed in the style of an earlier Red River home or a standard Métis home in the North West at the time. The slightly rectangular shape, shingle roof and brick chimneys are reminiscent of the Riel home. Note also the panelled front door with 'removed' double door, rain bucket or well, picket fence, shed and general appearance of the yard.

**Figure 9**
The Vermette home (M. Toussaint and Mme, née Elise Tourond), St-Pierre-Jolys (Rivièr-aux-Rats), Manitoba, turn of the century.

Of particular interest in the partial view of the façade are the cove siding, ornamental moulding on the window and the door frames, summer screen door, front door landing and step. The Riel home exhibited many of these features in 1885. As well, the exterior of the home, as suggested by a Riel family descendant, was whitewashed and probably took on a similar exterior appearance. Note the absence of grass or lawn and of a defined pathway to the front entrance. Note the patch of couchgrass and random growth of wild, and possibly of a few cultivated flowers, on the border along one side of the house.

**Figure 10**
Joseph Charette home, St-Norbert, around 1890.
The farm home is similar to the Riel residence in style and size. Many exterior features of this Métis home and its setting also suggest a comparison with the Riel home for the same period. For example, note the 'decorative' paint on the soffit, window frames and corner boards; as well as the annex, shingled gable roof, brick chimney, wooden eavestrough and rain barrel. It is highly probable that the engraving of the Riel residence is a slightly embellished or romanticized projection and the farmyard in particular presented a more rugged appearance.

**Figure 11**
Honoré (Lapointe dit) Désautels family home, Ste-Anne-des-Chênes, ca. 1890.

This French-Canadian family settled in the area in the 1880's. The home (log-sided or frame?) is also similar to the Riel home except for the vertical siding. Note again the ornamental moulding on the window and door frames, and the brick chimney. It has a similar setting to the Riel residence, being a farm house in a village community. Elements of the home, such as the panelled interior door and batten exterior side door, boardwalk and doorsteps or porch at each entrance provide comparative evidence for the interpretation of Riel House. Note also the rail fencing and wild grasses interspersed with compacted earth in the yard.

**Figure 12**
Honoré (Lapointe dit) Désautels home around 1915.

This photograph is particularly useful to show the evolution of the landscape and certain exterior features of the home. Note in particular the painted horizontal siding, shingles on the gable end and the decorative paint
on the fascia board, soffit and corner posts of the home. The house has acquired an exterior summer screen door and is surrounded by a wooden platform. The yard has also taken on a more residential or cared for appearance. Note the tree plantations, climbing vine and shrubbery.

Figure 13
The question of a well remains elusive. A bucket type well [brimbale], if any, probably existed during the 19th century period of occupation. There is documentary evidence on the digging of a well and the purchase of a pump between 1906 and 1909.103

References to the interior of the Riel home in 1885 and after are quite frequent but vague, and at times, contradictory. In June 1885, a reporter for the Winnipeg Sun went to the home in St-Vital to interview Mme Julie (see account, Appendix A). There is not doubt he was at the existing home104 although his description of the interior layout, the 'single' room apartment and four windows contradicts the as-found evidence of six windows and three room partition on the main floor. Yet, he observed features such as the staircase, garret and back kitchen found in the home. Perhaps he was deceived by some window coverings or closed bedroom doors. The main value of the account is the detail of the interior furnishings and decorations. Of particular interest are the descriptions of the occupants; family portraits and of the 'nail from the cross', which, along with a medal, had reportedly been sent to Louis by Pope Pius IX.
Other newspaper references to the Riel home on the occasion of Louis' lying in state and funeral in December 1885 do not necessarily confirm or deny the one room arrangement on the main floor. Le Manitoba referred to "une chambre mortuaire toute drapée pour la circonstance." Le Manitoba Daily Free Press reported that:

The former home of the Rebel chieftain is draped in mourning. The body, which is encased in a beautiful metallic casket has been placed upon a bier in one corner of the room. At its head a small altar has been erected, brilliantly illuminated and adorned with emblems ... the wife of Riel lay on a bed on one side of the room ... while Mme Riel, mother of the deceased, in the midst of paroxysms of grief swung a hammock in which lay the elder child... A reference to a three room floor arrangement on the main floor is a 1929 newspaper account. In an interview with Honoré Riel at the home, Lillian Gibbons reported that "the Riel family moved from the Seine to the Red River to a three room log house now Riel Post Office" [emphasis mine]. The testimony was in all probability based on oral tradition and not actual eyewitness accounts as Joseph (1857-1921) and Alexandre Riel (born in 1863 and still living) would have little if any recollection of the move to the River Road home in the fall of 1864. In a subsequent visit to the home in 1937, Miss Gibbons referred to a "brown and tan boarded house" which contained many artifacts and mementoes of Louis. She stood in the wooden coffin in which his body had been returned from Regina and noted:

... a rusty sword, also in the [chimney] cupboard [with the coffin] ... said to have been given by Lord Selkirk in 1816 to Jean Bte Lagimodière and a small flat iron with 'Walker III' on it, weighing but 2½ pounds which belonged to Marie-Anne Gaboury, wife of Jean Bte. It was the first iron in the country, brought in 1807.
The upstairs or second storey was certainly used as sleeping quarters and probably already subdivided into four bedrooms in 1885. Twelve people, six adults and six young children resided in the home at least semi-permanently in the winter of 1885.  

There was references to photographs of Dumont [Gabriel], Lépine [Ambroise?], the Lagimodières and other relatives in the home in the 1880's. Shortly after Louis' death, Mme Lucie Lee of Montréal, Julie Riel's sister-in-law, sent her a portrait of Mgr Bourget and an Agnus Dei "... pour la chère femme de Louis. Tous ces objets il les admirait pendant ses visites chez-moi." Sr Sara had sketched the mission of Ile à la Crosse in 1874 and made another sketch of the mission in the 1860's from an earlier rendering. They were offered to Mgr Taché as a gift and copies [or another set] to Henriette. It is possible that they were displayed in the home at some time. After her death in December 1883, some of Sr Sara's prized possessions, among them a picture of the Sacred-Heart and some dried pansies which she had picked were sent to her mother as a souvenir. The family subscribed to local newspapers [les gazettes] such as Le Métis and Le Manitoba and received periodicals from Québec. At the time of Riel's trial and execution, the family read all reports of the proceedings. Countless notes of sympathy and eulogies were received at the St-Vital home. A Montréal musician composed a special funeral march. Protestations and condolences in the form of parchments were received from associations such as l'Union St-Pierre and La Société St-Jean-Baptiste of Montréal and the Association Franco-Canadienne of Glen Falls, New York. In January, 1886, the Canadian Government returned Louis' few belongings to Mme Henriette (Riel) Poitras. The package consisted of:
... one valise, one pair pants, one vest, one wool overshirt, one cotton shirt, one pair cotton drawers, one pair woollen drawers, six pairs socks, one pair shoes, one soft felt hat, one pair wool gloves, one pocket handkerchief.

The activities, purchases and general standard of living of the family are well documented in the 1880's and 90's. Between ca. 1880 and 1910, there is some evidence of wool spinning and carding, extensive vegetable gardening, butter making and revenue from the sale of dairy products such as milk and eggs. Joseph Riel and other members of the family were wintering cattle at St-Pierre-Jolys and St-Malo in the 1890's. Joseph bought a variety of agricultural implements for the farm in the 1880's. In 1881, he purchased a breaker or plow from Archibald and Howell at a cost of $39. In 1895, a Singer sewing machine was acquired. In 1892, Joseph Riel received a statement of $20 for the purchase of a sleigh and, in 1911, he bought a cutter or democrat from Tudhope Anderson & Assoc. In the 1880's, foodstuffs, clothing and general merchandise were purchased mainly at Verge d'Auteuil (see Appendix B), and, Trudeau and Létourneau (see Appendix C), merchants in St-Boniface. After the turn of the century, the family's suppliers were Hince and Rodrigue, Varenne's, Guay and Son, and Alfred Goulet, who operated stores in the St-Boniface - St-Vital area. An account of Louis Riel with I.G. Baker at Fort Benton in 1882 (see Appendix D) provides some examples of purchased goods. Similarly, a memo book belonging to Mme Amanda Riel (second wife of Joseph), reveals the kind of foodstuffs and articles purchased for the home around 1906-1910 (Appendix E).
Accounts for the home in 1885-1886, particularly the frequent purchases of brandy, suggest increased visitation and at least a temporary reliance on purchased foodstuffs during the mourning period. On the other hand, Mme Amanda Riel's ca. 1906 entries suggest the regular purchase of ready-made food products. By the turn of the century, the family had become more urbanized or less dependent on home grown products.
Endnotes

1 Historical reports include the study on Riel House by Jean-Pierre Proulx (1972) and Robert Gosman (1975). In The Riel and Lagimodièrre Families in Métis Society, 1840-60, Mr. Gosman provided valuable insight into the early activities and comparative social positions of the family. But recurring conflicting historical and architectural evidence over the house construction date and the strong suggestion of a post-1870 structure made imperative a re-examination of some previously held assumptions or interpretations. As a result, it also became necessary to document the social and economic activities or lifestyle of the Riels after 1860 or more specifically in the 1870's and 1880's.

2 Louis Riel and Julie Lagimodièrre were married by Mgr J.N. Provencher in St-Boniface on January 21, 1844. Jean-Baptiste Lagimodièrre and Marie-Anne Gaboury settled on lot 683 or 684, at the junction of the Seine and Red rivers, around 1816. For a detailed account see L. Champagne, "La Terre de Jean-Baptiste Lagimodièrre," Report for La Société historique de St-Boniface, 1979. Family tradition also maintains that Louis fils was born in his grandparents' home or nearby on October 22, 1844. See Archives of La Société historique de St-Boniface (hereafter ASHSB), Notes d'Henriette Riel (Poitras); G.F.G. Stanley, Louis Riel, 1963, p. 2. According to W.F. Bryant in The Blood of Abel, 1886, p. 37 and based on correspondence with Henriette Riel, "Louis Riel was born at St-Boniface, on a river lot on the western bank of a small creek [Seine] which runs into the Red River from the east, a little north of the present site of Winnipeg ... The house in which the child [Louis] was born was a small one-storey, straw thatched log structure, containing but a single room..."


5 E.H. Oliver, op. cit., Dec. 9, 1852, p. 388.

6 Ibid., p. 389.

7 Agreement done at Fort Garry between Chief Trader Alex N. Buchanan and Louis Riel, cited in notes of abbé P. Picton, ASHSB.

8 Manitoba. Provincial Archives (hereafter cited as PAM), Hudson's Bay Company Archives (hereafter cited as HBCA), E.6/6, Register 'B'. Information is sketchy but provides no evidence that a mill was erected on lot 756, only that the land was the security for the loan. It is also possible that Riel was renting a portion of lot 793 and other lots through which his canal was cut from the Hudson's Bay Company as yearly rent is stipulated.

9 HBCA, B.235/a/15, 1851-54, folio 52, "Extracts from William Black's Private Journal," entry for 27 March 1854: "On the 25th, completed the arrangement with Riel for the sum of £100 promised him by Mr. Buchanan on the security of his water mill across the Rivièr la Seine," cited in R. Gosman, The Riel and Lagimodière Families in Métis Society, 1840-60, Note 28, p. 120. This suggests the mill was completed and the money advanced. Notes respecting lot 756 in Register 'B' are as follows: "24 acres, Transfer around spring 1855."
10 Belleau Coll., Copy of a letter from Mgr Taché to Mgr de Mazenod, Marseilles, 1852 cited in R. Gosman, op. cit., Note 25, p. 88. Is this a reference to the farm at the forks of the Red and Seine rivers or on lot 756? There is no specific date as to acquisition of lot 756 by Riel père or when he actually farmed it. It is possible that the family resided briefly in temporary or rented quarters on this land when Riel père was reportedly farming, during the interval of his milling operations (i.e. ca. 1847-1852). Riel was moving milling equipment in 1853 (see Minutes of Council, in E.H. Oliver, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 389) which suggests he was still at the location of first mill, at the forks).

11 Prospère Ducharme owned lots 745-748 inclusive, located in the vicinity of lot 756. HBCA, E.6, Register 'B'. See Stanley, op. cit., p. 20.

12 No reference is provided for this statement.

13 Winnipeg Free Press, February 13, 1931.

14 This could be anytime between 1847 and 1852, before the second milling enterprise. J. Tassé. op. cit., p. 355.

15 On the basis of Register 'B' in which lot 756 is Riel père's only registered claim, R. Gosman, op. cit., maintains that Riel père erected his second mill, a grist mill, on that lot. A survey of lot 103 (formerly 756) and a traverse of the Seine River in 1874 reported no building remains or mill race on this land still owned by Louis Riel. PAM, RG 17, Field Notebook #543.
16 Archives Srs Grises de Montréal, St-Boniface, *Annales*, juillet 1855.


18 PAM, HBCA, E.6/6, Register 'B', and MG 2, B3, RRS Census, 1838.

19 PAM, HBCA, Register 'B'.

20 According to declarations by Joseph Riel, younger son of Louis Riel père (born 1857), and Roger Goulet, surveyor (appointed by Council of Assiniboia in 1856), in 1891: Lagimodière purchased the land from Gendron "about 1862" and erected a grist mill. Hudson's Bay Company documents refer to deliveries from Lagimodière's mill in 1858. It is possible that with a time lapse of over thirty years, they were both unclear as to the exact date of "purchase" by Lagimodière. There is also a possibility that Lagimodière and Gendron defined by purchase around 1862 an informal agreement that had been going on for some time, or according to the custom of the country, since the early 1850's. Gendron appears to have occupied only the Red River frontage of lot 793. Manitoba, Mines and Natural Resources (Dept. of Interior Correspondence, Homestead files), correspondence re lot 50.

21 Ibid., 18 Feb. 1891.

22 PAM, HBCA, Register 'B'.
Manitoba. Mines and Natural Resources. Register of land grants and titles for Parish of St-Vital. Lagimodière had originally settled on lot 682, near the junction of the Seine and the Red, close to his father, Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière. He also claimed lot 35, on the west bank of the Red, in the parish of St-Vital. He claimed the lot by 1871 but only obtained patent in 1885. This can illustrate somewhat that "custom of the country" and the reticence of registering claims. The Mètis generally preferred to keep most agreements informal or private. This practice enabled them to change lands more easily or without liability to the Company.

Joseph was barely seven years old when his father died. The fact may also have been considered unimportant to the objective in mind. Lagimodière and Riel were both involved in the Sayer incident in 1849. As brothers-in-law with common commercial interests, it is reasonable to believe that they jointly undertook a milling enterprise.


J. Tassé, op. cit., p. 355. According to W.F. Bryant, in The Blood of Abel (1887), p. 39, the Graisse Creek was a tributary of the Red River running almost parallel to the Seine. Riel père connected the two streams, the Seine and the Graisse, by a canal, thus augmenting the mill-driving force of the Seine. Bryant corresponded with the Riel Family in 1885-1886. Abbé P. Picton in "Notes" at the ASHSB says that Riel père's canal ran between Prairie Grove, the lands of the Sisters [Grey Nuns] and the Seine.
Louis Riel’s accounts as discussed by R. Gosman, op. cit., pp. 90-91. Urbain Delorme and Antoine Gingras, for example, were prosperous traders yet in debt to the Company. Riel’s debt, although not negligible, was quite in proportion with his activity. Considering the Company's commercial monopoly and his wish to do business, Riel may not have been anxious to clear his debts.

Archives Archiépiscopales de St-Boniface, (hereafter AASB), Louis Riel à Mgr A.A. Taché, St-Boniface, 2 janvier 1862.

The incident witnessed by Louis Schmidt is reported by Stanley in Louis Riel, p. 22.

J. Tassé, op. cit., p. 377. There is no reference to a carding mill in Hudson's Bay Company correspondence or accounts.


According to a declaration by Mgr Taché on October 30, 1882:

... I purchased the said land [lot 51] from Joseph Landry who possessed and occupied it some fifteen years ago [ca. 1867]. I gave the said land to Julie Riel who was already at the time widow of the late Louis Riel. Mme Julie Riel took possession immediately of the said land which was given to her personally [emphasis mine] ... has occupied said land without interruption and still occupies it.
Manitoba, Mines and Natural Resources (Dept. of Interior Correspondence, Homestead files), correspondence re lot 51. But in a statement on July 13, 1875, Mme Riel claimed that the land was purchased from the Catholic Mission almost ten years ago [1865], ibid. At the turn of the century, Father A.G. Morice who corresponded with Joseph Riel wrote to Riel about a letter he had received from him which said

vous m'avez écrit qu'avant les troubles il [Louis] travaillait la terre où je reste maintenant ... toute la famille étant venu s'établir dans l'automne de 1864 après la mort de mon père à St-Vital.

PAM, MG 3, D 1, lettre 456, A.G. Morice à Joseph Riel, 6 juillet 1907.

34 There would be many good reasons for the family to move to western or Red River frontage of lot 51. Since 1862, a chapel and a school taught by the Grey Nuns was established on lot 48, less than a mile from the new residence. Mme Riel and her young family could not operate a mill which was not proving a very profitable venture lately, with all the droughts and limited markets. There was also more settlement along the fertile agricultural lands bordering the Red. Julie would be closer to her friends and family, the Naults, Proulx and Sauvès.

35 Evidence in HBCA Register 'B' and Homestead files are unclear. According to Register 'B', lot 793 minus 24 acres was clearly transferred to Landry on Feb. 29, 1864. The date of transfer of 24 acres to Lagimodière, however, is unclear. Similarly, Landry's location on the lot probably preceded the date of entry in the register.
In a declaration, September 7, 1882, Landry now residing at Rivière aux Rats stated that he had known lot 51 for 30 years [1852] which suggests that he was located there in the 1850's. Ironically, it was customary to procure a transfer or make a land entry at the time of its sale rather than purchase.

36 'Bodé', a common French-Canadian sobriquet, was the 'nickname' of Edouard Ellémont, son-in-law of Benjamin Lagimodière, Julie's brother. In the English translation of Riel's papers, it is erroneously identified as 'Boder', 'Body', etc.

37 Manitoba, Mines and Natural Resources (Dept. of the Interior Correspondence, Homestead files), declaration of Roger Goulet, 2 April, 1891.

38 Ibid., February 12, 1891.


40 PAM, MG 2, B 6, Report of Executive Relief Committee, Parish of St-Vital, 1868.

41 Archives Nationales du Québec, (hereafter cited as ANQ), Collection Chapais, Papiers Riel, réponse au Dr Lynch.

42 Louis Riel returned home from Montréal by way of St-Paul. He arrived at St-Boniface on July 26, 1868.
ANQ, Collection Chapais, Papiers Riel, réponse au Dr Lynch.


P. Priess, memo re Riel House, Structure 2, May 17, 1979, p. 3.


According to an approximation of the location of the structures on the Baudry map of 1871 by K. Elder, the building on the northern eight chains of lot 51 is in the relative location of the present Riel House. See Parks Canada, E & A, RSD, K. Elder, Architectural Analysis and Conservation Concept (1976), p. 41 and Figure 26, p. 43. See also PAM, RG 17, Baudry's notebook, No. 271, 1872, p. 35; McPhillips' notebook, No. 555, 1873, p. 19 reported two buildings in same location as Baudry on the Red River frontage of lot 51.

Ibid., Baudry, No. 271, Preface.

Manitoba. Mines and Natural Resources (Dept. of the Interior Correspondence, Homestead files). Declarations of François Larivièrè, 26 June, 1879, Paul Proulx, 14 July 1879 and André Beauchemin, 30 July, 1879.

Ibid., Declaration of Mme Julie Riel, 12 July 1875.

Ibid., Declaration of Marie Sauvé, Charles Nault, Amable Gaudry Sr. and Baptiste Laurence, 2 November, 1875.

As noted in R. Gosman, Riel House, St-Vital, July 1975, MR No. 171, p. 6.
Manitoba, Mines and Natural Resources (Dept. of the Interior Correspondence, Homestead files), Declaration of André Beauchamp, 30 July 1879.

Ibid., Declaration of François Larivièrè, 26 June 1879.

PAM, RG 17, Baudry's notebook, No. 271, p. 35 and McPhillips' notebook, No. 555, p. 19. Note also Riel's declaration of October 20, 1871 that he wanted "no surveyors on my land."

PAM, MG 3, D2, Mme Julie Riel à Louis, 29 mars 1878.

Ibid., Louis Lavallée à Louis Riel, St-Vital, 11 juin 1878. On March 5, 1878, Louis Riel signed a declaration in New York, granting power of attorney to his mother for disposal or/and administration of all his lands.

PAM, MG 3, D2, Mme Julie à Louis, St-Vital, 15 octobre 1878.

In letters to Louis on August 28, 1880 and May 22, 1881, Joseph Riel reported "Louison sont rendus encore une fois par ici..." and "... [Louison] Il a trop de fatigue. Il tient un petit magasin et cela le fatigue beaucoup..."

PAM, MG 3, D2. Lavallée's obituary in 1935 reported that "for several years a merchant at St-François-Xavier and later at St-Vital, near Riel's home on lot 51."

Upon their marriage, Henriette and Jean-Marie appear to have resided on his parents' land in the vicinity of lot 110 in St-Boniface, about three miles from the Riel home. Lot 110 was inherited by Magdeleine Fisher, wife of François Poitras from her father, Chief Trader Henry Fisher. By the 1890's, Henriette was living in St-Vital briefly in the Riel home then in a house nearby. She was assisting her mother in the care of Jean and Angélique, Louis' orphaned children. In 1895, Angélique
wrote to relatives: "... Mon oncle Jean [Poitras] est bien, sont rendus dans leur petite maison ..."

ASHSB, Dossiers Riel. The Riel family (Joseph and Alexandre) and the Lavallées (Octavie), Gladus (Eulalie) and Poitras (Henriette) were often visiting each other and 'wintering' or spending extended periods on land acquired at St-Malo (La Rochelle) and St-Pierre (Rivière aux Rats) by the 1880's and later.

61 Mme Riel had first applied for patent in 1875. Subsequently, she had to establish her residence, Lavallée's claim and finally obtain power of attorney from Louis who now resided in the United States, since all lands were in his name. In February 1884, Lavallée renounced his claim in favour of Mme Riel. Her intent was to immediately sign quit claims in favour of her sons Joseph and Alexandre and divide the land between them.

62 Manitoba, Mines and Natural Resources (Dept of the Interior, Homestead files), Correspondence re lots 50 and 51, Parish of St-Vital.

63 Ibid., Between 1881 and 1886, a series of mortgages were registered against the lot. Lavallée was in debt to Thibaudeau Frères and Bannatyne and Co. Thibaudeau and Strang, the latter acting for Bannatyne interests, became the owners of the southern four chains of lot 51 in April, 1886. The Lavallées may have resided on the property a few more years. Octavie (Riel) Lavallée died at St-Malo in December 1890.
They probably resided on a portion of lot 51 which belonged to Mme Julie, immediately south of the homestead. There is a municipal record for a sale to Poitras by Joseph Riel in 1901 and re-purchase by Riel in 1912. Henriette (Riel) Poitras died at St-Vital in 1898. Poitras may have remained there for a few years. In 1910 he married Rosalie Lagimodière and they made their residence in St-Boniface. Electoral lists for 1893 and 1899 in the Riel Papers, give Poitras' address as lot 51.

Manitoba, Mines and Natural Resources (Dept. of the Interior, Homestead files), Correspondence re lot 50, Declaration of Joseph Riel, corroborated by Alexandre, February 12, 1891.

Joseph Riel stated (see note 33) that the family moved to River Road in the fall of 1864 following his father's death at the Seine River home. There is no mention of a particular dwelling. In an interview by Lillian Gibbons in the Winnipeg Tribune on July 23, 1937, nephew Honoré Riel reported: "My father [Joseph] had told me the house was built in 1867 or 1868, and Louis Riel lived in it before the troubles of 1869." But Honoré was born in 1898 and the recollection of his half-sister Joséphine (Mme Carrière), born in 1885, that there was another house should take precedence. The family would naturally have accentuated Louis' association with the lot and the dwelling.
These biased descriptions are predominant in the English literature of the period. See for example accounts by Ross, Hargrave, Milton and Cheadle as well as Butler. It is interesting to note that French-Canadian contemporaries such as Dugas and Prud'homme present quite a different picture.

AASB, Lestanc à Taché, 22 mai 1863.

PAM, MG 3, D2, Mme Julie à Louis, 20 mars 1874; 18 janvier 1878.

His letters home exhibited concern and desire to assist the family although his means were limited. He advised his mother to sell his lands in Manitoba and signed over power of attorney in March, 1878.

In an undated letter to Louis ca. 1874-75, Mme Julie wrote: ... "Tu me disais dans ta dernière lettre de vendre la terre de la Pointe à Grouette si nous avions besoin. J'avais réellement besoin, car j'ai été contraint d'aller emprunter de l'argent chez Bannatyne ... M. Ritchot vient de me faire demander pour donner un peu de secours. Nous avons reçu £3 de Mgr [Taché] au Jour de l'An, £4 à la fin de février ... " PAM, MG 3, D2.

PAM, MG 3, D1, Lettre 80, Sr Sara à Louis, St-Vital, 20 février 1871.

PAM, MG 3, D2, Marie à Louis, St-Vital, 9 mai 1872.

Ibid., 30 avril 1872. According to French-Canadian custom, a hangar was usually a free standing shed for storing provisions, wood and other goods. It was often located between the house and the barn.
PAM, MG 3, D1, 1. 209, Sr Marguerite-Marie (Sara), à Maman, frère bien-aimé, Ile à la Crosse, 30 juillet 1873. After her death in December 1883, most of these family photographs were returned to her mother. Ibid., letter 408, Sr Agnès à Mme Riel, 4 juin 1884. Unfortunately, there is no known photograph of Sr Sara. According to records of the Grey Nuns, the earlier photograph of a sister leaving for the North West missions is 1872. Sr Sara had left in 1871. Regulations at first discouraged photographs, particularly for frivolous or purely social reasons. These rules were eventually relaxed, however, particularly for sisters undertaking long journeys, with a possibility of never returning to "civilization". There are photographs of many of Sr Sara's contemporaries such as Srs Connelly, Delorme, McDougall, Goulet and Nolin.

Ibid., St-Bruno, 27 août 1873. Sr Sara was also sending some caribou skins as gifts to the family. Both her and Marie made moccassins or souliers mous.

PAM, MG 3, D2, Marie à Louis, St-Vital, 12 mai 1872.

Ibid., Mme Julie à Louis, St-Vital, 26 août 1878.

Ibid., Louis à Marie, St-Paul, 27 avril 1872.

Louis Lavallée wrote to Mme Julie on April 24, 1875, "Octavie est allée aux érables avec ma grand-mère ramasser l'eau." PAM, MG 3, D2.

Ibid., Louis à sa mère, Keeseville, 1 février 1878.
The main difficulty was getting a notarial declaration from Cyrille Dumas, the original owner who had sold the land to Louis Riel in 1869. Dumas had moved and had to be persuaded to sign a new declaration. In the meantime, the sales to Delorme and afterwards Berthelet, fell through. In February 1880, Joseph Riel wrote to his brother, "Pour les affaires de terre [sic], je n'ai rien pu faire encore ..." In August he reported, "... Je n'ai encore rien fait arranger. Ils me traitent tant au bureau des terres que je n'ai reçu aucune patente ..." In May 1881, he advised, "... J'ai pu vendre la terre de St-Boniface que [$] 410. PAM, MG3, D2.

Manitoba, Mines and Natural Resources. (Dept. of the Interior, Homestead files), Declaration of Joseph Riel, February 12, 1891.

It should be noted that Mme Julie could not write. Her daughters, at first Marie and Octavie, and then Henriette, usually wrote for her. Joseph wrote passably, and Alexandre and Louison Lavallée had completed a near secondary education at St-Boniface college.

PAM, MG 3, D2. Mme Julie à Louis, St-Vital, 27 juin 1877.

Ibid., Louis à sa mère, s.d. [1877].

Ibid., Mme Julie à Louis, 15 janvier 1878.

It was evidently the site of the Riel père and Lagimodièrge grist mill. Bode's house may not have been the one the Riel family moved to in 1853, but may have been the house later occupied by the Riel Family or where Louis père died in 1864.
PAM, MG 3, D2. Mme Julie à Louis, 29 mars 1878.

Ibid., Louis à Joseph [Riel], Keeseville, 23 juin 1878.

Parcs Canada, Louis to Joseph, Pointe au Loup, Montana, juillet 1880.

Ibid., Joseph à Louis, 27 avril 1880.

Ibid., Joseph à Louis, 28 août 1880.

Ibid., André (Nanin) Nault à Joseph Riel, Pointe des Chênes (Ste-Anne), 4 juin 1880.

Ibid., Joseph à Louis, 22 mai 1881.

Henriette Riel (Poitras) in her letters to Louis in 1885 refers to Alexandre as being 'at home'. In 1885 Mme Julie grants him the southern four chains of lot 50 but he does not occupy the land until 1891.

Winnipeg Sun, Thursday, June 11, 1885.

Ibid.

Peter N. Moogk, Building a House in New France (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975), p. 35. Dovetailing of corners became widespread in 19th century French Canada but it was an English influence or more common in Upper Canada and the United States.


Lessard, Michel & Marquis, Marguerite, Encyclopédie de la Maison Québécoise (Montréal: Editions de l'Homme, 1972), pp. 651, 653, 701. The summer kitchen was used from June to October, weather permitting. All general housework such as laundry and cooking were done there.
During the winter it was used for storing food and firewood.

102 Expressions such as these or the 'throne' for the outhouse, were common. See AASB, Father Lestanc to Bishop Taché, 13 July, 1861.

103 PAM, MG 3, D2, Comptes de Joseph Riel:

104 This was the only Riel home in St-Vital at the time. The brother-in-law next door was Louis Lavallée and another brother-in-law, Poitras, lived a few miles north, in St-Boniface. Alexandre Riel only built his home on lot 50 or the Seine portion of lot 51 after 1890.

105 Le Manitoba, 17 décembre 1885. This statement suggests more than one room on the main floor.

106 Manitoba Daily Free Press, December 11, 1885.

107 Winnipeg Tribune, July 20, 1949, Lilliam Gibbons, "Miller of the Seine's Millstones," and an article in the Manitoba Free Press, October 12, 1929, clipping in Riel files, ASHSB. The three room partition in the Riel home appears to have been typical of French-Canadian homes of the period. See for example the engraving "La Bénédiction du Jour de l'An" by E.J. Massicotte, PAC, C-1111, Fig. 14.
Miss Gibbons would have spoken to children of Joseph and Alexandre Riel, all born after 1881. Eulalie (Riel) Gladu, was still living but was not interviewed.

Winnipeg Tribune, July 23, 1937. Interview with Honoré Riel (Son of Joseph Riel, born 1898) by Miss Lillian Gibbons.

Living in the home were Mme Julie Riel, son Joseph, wife Éléonore and a daughter Joséphine born August 5, 1885; at least part of the time if not at his father-in-law's or at Rivière aux Rats, Alexandre, wife Elisa, and daughter Éléonore born in April 1882, son Louis born in April 1884 and son David born in November 1885 (died in April 1886); and daughter-in-law, Marguerite and two children, Jean and Angélique. One must not forget, however, that ten to twelve people living in a 1½ storey dwelling such as the Riel home was not uncommon at the time. They had comparatively more space than many families. The children were all infants, the eldest being three years old.

PAM, MG 3, D2, Mme Lucie Lee à Julie Riel, Montréal, 29 janvier 1886. Lucie was a younger sister of Louis Riel père. Louis fils visited her often while at college in Montréal and during his exile. She died in 1894.

PAM, MG 3, D1, Letter 406, Sr Agnès à Mme Riel, 29 décembre 1883.
113 PAM, MG 3, D2, M. Adélaïd Boucher, Éditeur de Musique, Montréal, "Mort du Héros." Original manuscript in ASHSB, Coll. Riel.

114 Ibid. Vêtements renvoyés à Mme Henriette Poitras, Régina, 14 janvier 1886.

115 Ibid., Sister Riel requested some washed wool, uncarded, in a letter home, March 6, 1882. The family was also shipping wool to Sherbrooke, Québec: Invoice, Magog Woolen Mills, October 10, 1908: Purchase 2 pair blankets, 1 1/3 yds. scarlet flannel, 3 1/2 yds. scarlet flannel, 3 1/2 yds grey flannel, 2 1/2 yds Tweeds, Freight paid for wool. Credit 70 lbs unwashed wool = $14. Joseph raised sheep in the 1890's and at the turn of the century.

116 PAM, MG 3, D2, Misc. acct's and receipts of Joseph Riel, 1890's; MG 3, D1, Sr Sara Riel to her family, Île à la Crosse, 2 août 1880:

... Voulez-vous me faire la charité de me donner tous chacun un plein dë de toutes les graines de jardin, oignons, ciboulettes, oignons d'Egypte, carottes, choux de Siam, choux, choux-fleurs, rabioles, cerfeuil, raves, betteraves, salade, radis, panets, céleri, citrouilles, graines d'érable, graines de fleurs ...

117 Ibid., January 21, 1881, and implements from Smith Falls Agricultural Works, February 12, 1881. The latter advised of the location of a warehouse in Emerson as of the winter of 1881.

118 Ibid., Invoice for Singer sewing machine, No. S-5D, 12466470, $50, Paid, September 16, 1895.

119 There were many visits and probably more residents in the home between the spring and winter of 1885.
Figure 3

Location of structural remains

Source - M Forsman, Archaeological Research at Riel House Man. 1976 p. 16
Subdivision of lot 51 by Julie Riel, 1884 - 90
6. Alexandre Riel house, built ca. 1890, in 1967, PAM.
7. Riel Family Home in 1885 [1886], PAM.
8. Log dovetailed house near St-Albert [Alberta], ca. 1895, Alberta Archives.
9. Vermette Home, St-Pierre-Jolys, Man. ca. 1900, ASASB.
10. Charette Home, St-Norbert, Man. ca. 1890, PAM.
11. Désautels Home, Ste-Anne-des-Chênes, Man. ca. 1890, PAM.
12. Déautels Home, Ste-Anne-des-Chênes, Man. ca. 1915, PAM.
13. Brimbale, Québec, ca. 1920, PAC, C-31484.
14. Typical French-Canadian Home, Québec, 1912, PAC, C-1111.
Appendix A.

Winnipeg Sun, Thursday, June 11, 1885.

Riel's Home
A Visit to St. Vital - with His Mother and Brothers.

Learning that some letters had been received by Riel's people at St. Vital in regard to the fighting at Batoche, and respecting Louis Riel himself, a reporter, accompanied by a French interpreter, drove out to that point yesterday to secure what information he could pick up. The drive to St. Vital is on no occasion a very inviting jaunt, especially as the roads are rough, and in summer the hungry mosquitos are fierce in their attacks; but to travel the road amid a pelting rain storm and the slush and mud being dashed into one's face, is an experience to be avoided whenever possible. A reporter has however, another incentive besides that of the soldier, which is duty; he possesses that scent for news which buoys him up, and begets that excitement which tends to make him forget his petty troubles and to even laugh at a storm and despise the mud with which his person is bespattered. The road to St. Vital winds along through country which is either too low for cultivation or is covered with scrub. Here and there little patches of wood, principally poplar, occur. One or two sloughs occur along the road, but the statute labor which has been done on the highway had been performed principally in these places so as to render the road passable. The road as mentioned before is far from straight. It follows the course of the river pretty well. It was used scores of years ago, and frequently used by Riel and his band of insurgents in 1869. It is understood that there are short cuts to St. Vital, but these are known only to the breeds who reside along the river. About two miles and a half out from St. Boniface the reporter recognized the spot in the shade of some trees, where, amid the gambols of about fifty million
mosquitoes over his person he interviewed Louis Riel about two years ago, when the rebel returned from Montana. The interview was published in the SUN, and will doubtless be remembered, as many things of interest were said concerning the Red River rebellion. But during all this time the horse has been trotting along briskly, notwithstanding the mud, and now some houses, which must be St. Vital, are in view. Inquiry is made for Riel's house.

"Yes, it's near here," said a comely-looking girl, wearing a broad pattern apron and speaking good English; "you turn the first corner to your left and keep on down the river and you'll soon come to it. It's a square house with a yard about it."

"Thank you."

Then in a few moments the horse was jogging on down the river bank.

"That must be the house," remarked the interpreter.

"No."

"Yes."

"No, it isn't: it's the next."

And the next it was. But before coming to it, some conversation was had with a man who lives one lot this side of Riel's house. He is a brother-in-law of Riel's, a nice kindly-faced half-breed, who told that a letter had been received from Louis Riel requesting his brother Joseph to go to Batoche and bring down his (Riel's) wife and children. After further talk with this man, and a ride of a hundred yards or so,

RIEL'S HOUSE WAS REACHED.

To secure greater coherency in the story it will now be advisable to continue it in the first person. Tying the horse at the gate, we proceeded across the grass-covered yard and around to the front of the house, where the door
faces the river about 600 yards distant. The door stood open. No ceremony except doffing the hat was exercised in entering. There were but two inmates in the interior — Alexandre Riel, brother of Louis, and a tall youth of about eighteen years with bright, sparkling eyes and a head of thick, black, coarse hair, which stood straight on end, giving the possessor a rather comical appearance. He went about in his bare feet, which were of prodigious size, and he smiled so good-naturedly all the time, that his presence was like sunshine in the room. Alexandre Riel is a fine, intelligent-looking man of about 28 years. He is not tall, but is very broad and athletic-looking. He wore a loose, blue derry shirt, and trousers which lacked suspenders to hold them up. He does not resemble Louis very much, except that his eyes are the same color, and he possesses the same straight nose. He was pleasant with us, but did appear very ready to talk about Louis. Yes, they had had a letter from Louis, but there was not much news in it except that he wanted his brother Joseph to go and bring his wife and children from Batoche.

Would he show the letter?

He would look for it, and he withdrew to a little back kitchen ostensibly to look for it.

Whilst he is absent, let us take a glance at the room and its furnishings. The word "room" is used because the house proper is all in one apartment. It is amply lighted by four windows, two in the front and one in each end. The room will be about fifteen feet by twenty. There is a comfortable looking bed in each of three corners, the other containing a staircase which leads to the garret above. Suspended over each bed, and hanging about the walls, are serval pictures, such as Jesus and Mary, Jesus on the cross, Jesus with a crown of thorns on his head, Jesus in
Gethsemane, Mary at the foot of the cross, Christ blessing little children, etc., etc. One peculiar little box, with a glass cover, was observed, beneath which a light was kept burning -- special mention will be made of this again. The furniture of the room consisted of a large, old fashioned bedstead, which looks as if it were never used, a sewing machine, several chairs of home manufacture, a large square box-stove, upon which our friend of the stand-upright hair usually sat, kicking his shoeless heels against the metal. Several old-fashioned trunks with brass nails occupied positions near the bed. This coupled with a few pin-cushions, a small table and a few other knick-knacks comprised the entire furnishing. Oh, yes; there was a large framed photograph of Louis Riel hanging over a bed, which we were told, was used by the mother. The photograph is an excellent one, being as true a likeness of the arch rebel as it would be possible to obtain. It is just exactly as the reporter remembers him two years ago. He wears a full beard, neither very heavy nor very long, but such as would be the result of "perfected manhood." His hair, although neatly combed, was long, but not more so than is frequently seen on individuals who aspire to write poetry. His fine features are brought out to magnificent advantage. He possesses as fine a nose as one would meet within a day's journey. His eyes, too, are large, and his forehead is finely shaped and large. The mouth is about the right size, the chin is well formed, and, indeed, little improvement could be suggested in the entire face. Hanging over another bed was a portrait, which we were told was Riel's father. It, too, represents the face and figure of a fine-looking man, of about 45 or 50 years of age. A great, broad, frank, intelligent face, with capital features, is shown. Not a single point could be detected that would indicate that the original was other than an educated European, nursed in the lap of luxury.
ALEXANDRE RETURNS.
But here comes Alexandre without the letter, which he says he could not find.
"Would he lend his brother's portrait?"
"No, he could not do that."
"Would he take $5 as a guarantee that it would be returned the next day?"
"No."
"Would he take $10?"
He shook his head. He would not like to think his brother's picture would be used to make money.
"But it was not to make money it was wanted, it was only to give the public a correct likeness of him."
"Well, the picture belonged to his mother and he could not and would not let it go."
Then Mrs. Riel was absent. That was a disappointment for us, because one object in coming was to see the old lady.
"Where was she gone to?"
"To Poitras', her son-in-law, about three miles distant, where we would doubtless find her."
As she must be seen, and as it was growing late, we bade the inmates good-bye, and set off.
A NAIL FROM THE CROSS.
While jogging along to Poitras' house we must tell about that curious little box hanging on the wall, and beneath which a light is kept constantly burning, of which mention was made above. We inspected the box closely and found that it contained a large rusty nail about four inches long with a round head on. The nail, head inclined, resembles very much those used for banging large pictures on walls.
We asked what it was, and were informed that it was a nail from the cross upon which our Saviour was crucified. It was one which had been used to pierce one of his hands.

How did they get it?

Oh, it was sent to Louis by Pope Pius the IX, in recognition of his (Riel's) conduct and services during the Red River rebellion. The Pope also sent a large medal to Louis, who has ever since worn it suspended about his neck. Our interest was specially aroused, as we were told that the Pope had assured Riel that the nail was actually from the cross. We examined it carefully. It looked old and rusty enough to have come out of the water-soaked ark. It laid on a red satin background, with a blue ribbon stamped with sealing wax tied about it. The following is a correct sketch of the nail as to dimensions and shape:

AT POITRAS'.

Whilst journeying along to Poitras', we were overtaken by John Joyal, of St. Boniface, who had been appointed inspector of noxious weeds, and who, notwithstanding the elements, was out attending to his duties.

Oh, yes, he knew where Poitras lived, and would take us there, as he wanted to see the old man. So the three of us went to Poitras', whose place we reached about 6 o'clock. Poitras himself, a genuine looking half-breed, and a very pleasant and hospitable man, opened the door for us. His son was there. After greeting introductions, a smoke (birch bark tobacco being used) we asked for Mrs. Riel. Yes, she was there, and he would call her.
MADAME RIEL.

In a few minutes the old lady appeared. She fervently kissed John Joyal and the French interpreter, but made no advances towards the present writer, whose mud-bespattered face doubtless counselled "discretion the better part of valor." Madame Riel walked into the room with firm step. Her head was bowed, and she looked grief-stricken. She took a chair opposite the window, and sat there in muteness, while the light shone on her face, affording an excellent opportunity for observation. She must be about 65 or 70 years old, and when young must have been fully five feet four inches in height. She is now somewhat bent with the weight of years. No wonder Louis has a large straight nose, for it would be difficult to find in a day's journey a straighter one than his mother's. It is also large. But the striking feature about the old lady is her bright blue eyes, which flash, when she speaks, as brightly as a child's of four years. They recede somewhat, and are overhand with black heavy eyebrows. Her mouth is large but sunken, owing to the loss of teeth. This allows her chin, which is prominent, to project so far that with the long nose the effect is rather unpleasant. She has exceedingly high cheek bones, which, with the thick head of black hair in which not a silver thread has made its appearance, and rather low forehead indicate the blood of the race which flows in her veins. She wore a faded black dress with loose waist, and had on a large apron of second mourning and a loose black kerchief hung loosely about her neck which is beginning to show the wrinkles of age. The old lady did not talk very much but when she did speak she always placed her hands over her breast, looked earnest and spoke with fervency. Being asked if she had heard from Louis lately, she replied that he had written a letter the day after he was taken to Regina asking his brother Joseph to go to Batoche and bring his wife and boy, about three years old, and girl, about two years, who were in a starving
condition, down to St. Vital and care for them, as he feared they would perish if left up there. He said to take no trouble about his trial, as he would be able to make arrangements for his defence and would try and manage as well as he could; but he urged, for God's sake, that his wife and children be taken care of. He said he had given himself up to Middleton, and had suffered no indignities from any of his attendants. He concluded by asking to be remembered to all his friends and by saying that he was in God's hands and would be taken care of.

Madame Riel was then asked what she thought of her son's work.

"I think," she replied after a pause, "that he has done no wrong. I know he meant no harm to anyone, and he was not working for his own interests. He has always been in trouble since 1869, and he is still in trouble; but he is in God's hands, and I must leave him there. He left me when he was 11 years old, but he never forgot his poor old mother, and always when he had a cent to give, he gave it cheerfully. I know he was not working for himself in this case."

Madame was then asked if she would like to give a more decided opinion on the conduct of her son.

She thought for about ten minutes, and then burst out:

"My son is good! Oh, God, my son is good! And if I was to tell my opinion of him, it would only appear as if I was foolish. I think so much of him. I know he did no wrong. My sorrow is too great to talk, but God will take care of Louis."

While she spoke her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkled. She was excited, and appeared exhausted after, for she soon subsided into quiet thought, and spoke little more during our stay.
RIEL'S SISTER,
who is married to Poitras' son, was also present during the
interview. She is an intelligent, kindly-looking matron, and
in a motherly way caressed her little children who were
hanging about her knees. She has the black hair and black
eyes of her race. She resembles in features somewhat her
brother. She talked little.
Appendix B.

Verge d'Auteuil. Importateur de Marchandises (sèches) Anglaises, Françaises

188[0]
Ave Taché acheté de Verge d'Auteuil imp. de Marchandises (sèches) Anglaises, Françaises

   Draps, casimires, tweeds, merinos, cobourg ... etc.
   Hardes faites, chaussures et coiffures et assortiment gén. d'articles de Fantaisie et de Toilette.
   dentelle
   brodious [broderie]
   shirtnif [night shirt]

1 p. souliers tapis [tapissés]
   kid
   bottines

2 p. bottines
   cottonade
   fil
Appendix C.

F. Létourneau, Importateur
St-Boniface, Manitoba
8 octobre 1885
Doit à F. Létourneau

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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Boîte sardines</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 1/2 # Biscuits</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Flask brandy</td>
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<td>1 Bot. brandy</td>
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<tr>
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Appendix D.

I.G. Baker & Co.
General Merchandise
Fort Benton, Montana Territory, Aug. 26, 1882
In Account with Mr. Louis Riel

1 Pr. Blankets
16 yds. Flannel
15 yds. Flannel
1 Pr. shoes
40 yds. Calico
10 yds. blue Calico
  3 pr. Hose
  3 pr. Hose
10 yds. blue Percale
10 yds. Light Calico
  1 pr. shoes
  1 Silk Handkerchief
  2 Childs Hose
  1 yd. Plain Flannel
  5 White Handkerchiefs
  1 Sk. Flower

21 # Sugar
  5 # Tea
  5 # Chocolate
1 Trunk
1 Pants
Appendix E.

Famille Riel
Comptes - nourriture, misc.
[1906-1910]

Hince & Rodrigue:
Groceries, Flour, Feed, Norwood, 229 St. Mary's Rd.

à Joseph Riel:
3 tin tomatoes, box baking soda, sugar, molasses, candies,
3 tin corn, barley ...

Commissions, listé d'Amanda Riel (Memo Book):
tabac, pain, biscuit soda, gruau - déc. 1906.
raisins, saumon, tomate, fil, perpemanne [peppermints],
clous, thé, savons, sac de son, gruau.
15: une caisse cacern [corn]

17: pain, balais, clous, prunes, raisin, vinaigre, stove polish, cornstarch, corn & tomatoes, peppermint, fils,
apaquet tabac, békin powder [baking powder].

19: sac de fleur [farine], deux paquets tabac, sirop, raisins,
saumon, globe (ampoule), tabac, pommes, fil, papermannes,
pain, salt, vessline [vaseline].

31: noix.
Part II: Riel Family and Lifestyle at St-Vital.

There is very little correspondence from or to the family in the 1860's. The family's residence and economic activities have been reasonably documented from other sources but their lifestyle has to be somewhat inferred. Louis Riel left home to study at the Petit Séminaire de Montréal in 1858. Few of his letters home have survived although his poetry reveals a sensitive and anguished young man.\(^1\) Some insight into the lifestyle and activities of the family during this period can be gleaned from the letters of Sara Riel. Sara and Marie were both students at the Grey Nuns Convent and Boarding School in St-Boniface in the 1860's. Sara became a professed nun of the Order in 1866, spending some time at St-Norbert and the convent-school at the mission of St-Vital. She wrote fairly regularly to Louis and visited the family home frequently. The eldest daughters were the only two who could have provided first-hand information on the home and family as Mme Julie could not write and the other children were barely of school-age.

The most traumatic event for the family was the father's sudden death in January, 1864, his twentieth wedding anniversary. If the Riels were shaken and virtually uprooted by this loss, young Louis in Montréal was beside himself. A letter home expressed his sorrow and exasperation. 

\[\ldots\text{Ah! quel coup! quand j'y pense, je me trouve comme dans un rêve! Mais encore une fois ne soyez [pas] inquiets de moi; si le coeur est malade je suis d'ailleurs assez bien. Je commence à reprendre mes sens.}^2\] It is believed that the shock contributed to his sudden departure from the college. The sudden responsibility of head of the
family and the "sense" of inherited leadership from his
father, preoccupied him and initiated a period of soul
searching between 1865 and his return to Manitoba in
1868. Although an earlier aspiration towards a religious
vocation was replaced by a political one, Louis remained
an intensely, almost mystically religious man. The family
heard little from him during this period. He spent some
time at his aunt and uncle, Lucie (née Riel) and John Lee who
lived near Montréal. He worked at the law office of
Rodolphe Laflamme, a prominent Rouge, requested a meeting
with George-Etienne Cartier, and even became engaged but
abandoned all these pursuits. Louis returned suddenly
to his people at the Red River Settlement a slightly
distraught but very committed young Métis. In the
meantime the family had moved to the present site on
the Red River and was "subsisting" with help from Marie
who taught school at St-Charles and Charles or "Meunier"
who continued to operate the mill with his uncle
Benjamin until around 1868 and then farmed the land.
The family received assistance from the Grey Nuns, abbé
Ritchot and Mgr Taché although poverty did not alter
its pride and resourcefulness.

The 1870's were definitely difficult years for the
family in St-Vital although conditions improved by the
latter part of the decade. The younger daughters,
Octavie, Eulalie and Henriette attended boarding school
at St-Boniface, Henriette longer than her elder sisters
who were recalled home to assist their mother. Joseph
and little Alexandre attended the near-by mission school
in St-Vital. Louis was forced into exile in 1873,
spending the next few years in the state of New York
and around Montréal. He was not in an economic
position to assist the family. In 1875-1876, he spent
some time in mental hospitals at Longue-Pointe and
Beauparl. After his release, he took up residence
with the Barnabés in Keeseville, New York, rented a small farm and attempted rather contrary to his inclination, to settle down as a farmer. He missed his native land and the family he could not visit nor protect.

The family suffered many affronts and persecution because of Louis' position. In 1871, a mob out to do away with him, broke into the house and tried to intimidate the two adult occupants, Mme Riel and daughter Marie. Le Métis reported the incident in the following terms.

Une violation de domicile accompagnée de circonstances vraiment odieuses a eu lieu à St-Vital, le 8 décembre courant. Vers neuf heures du soir, un parti de dix ou quinze hommes, armés de revolvers, ayant la figure voilée sont arrivés à la résidence de Madame Riel.... Après insolences et plaisanteries indécentes, ils sortirent. Au bout de quelques instants, la porte fut ébranlée par des coups violents comme des coups de pieds ... L'un deux, étant très agité, dirigea le canon de son revolver à bout portant sur Mademoiselle Riel [Marie] et la sonna de lui dire où était son frère ... il jura qu'il le tuerait cette nuit là même, dût-il parcourir toutes les maisons de la paroisse...

A similar incident occurred in 1873 when a warrant was issued for the arrest of Lépine and Riel.

Louis' forced absences and final departure from Manitoba between 1870 and 1873 occasioned much sorrow and anxiety but also served to unite the already close-knit family. Sister Sara summed up the situation in the following words: "... vous souffrez, vous êtes persécutés! vous êtes pauvres." The separation was particularly difficult for Mme Julie who declared:
"... Mon Garçon, Mon petit Louis! c'est tout pour moi, c'est ma vie!"11 Louis was elected Member of Parliament for Provencher three times between 1873 and 1874. In 1872, he had given up his seat in favour of the defeated Sir George-Etienne Cartier in the hope that the gesture would precipitate the granting of the promised amnesty. But Sir George died suddenly in 1873 and Louis was banished from the House after he signed the roll in March 1874.

Disillusioned, embittered and increasingly suspicious, even of his friends, Louis wrote home only occasionally between 1874 and 1878.12 Banished from Manitoba and losing all political rights, there was little future for him in the province he had founded. He never wavered in his affection and sense of duty to his family but the clandestine visits to the North Dakota border seemed to increase his frustration and sense of impotence. In 1875 Louis considered establishing residence at St-Joe and entered into a business association with Louis Demeules of St-Paul.13 There was mention of the family re-locating there with him but he did not return to the North-West. It is possible that some financial setback changed his plans as Demeules went bankrupt in the summer of 1875.

In the meantime, the growing family was becoming more self-reliant if not prosperous. The Riels exhibited a comparatively comfortable lifestyle. The daughters, particularly, were impeccably dressed and well groomed, Sr Sara had given them specific directives on decorum and department before her departure.
... une chose que je vous recommande plus particulièremenct c'est la propreté et la bonne tenue. Soyez toujours tirées à quatre épingles comme on dit. Tirez parti de tout pour épargner et ménager ... tenez à faire honneur à notre cher Louis, il y a droit. Soyez polies et réservées avec les étrangers, ne laissez rien, ou presque rien faire à Maman. Soyez fières ... qu'ils [enfants] soient toujours reluisants de propreté. Ce sera votre honneur.14

Photographs of Octavie and Eulalie (figure 2) and Henriette (figure 3) confirm this.

Intense loyalty to Louis and devotion to their mother characterized all family members. Great effort was made to shield Mme Julie from much of the anxieties and hardships of day to day life. Among the major concerns was the ever-present threat of illness and premature death. Marie died of influenza in 1873 and Charles also suddenly the following year while employed as a railroad worker near Ste-Agathe. It was feared for some time that both Octavie and Eulalie were poitrinaireis or afflicted with tuberculosis. The 1870's were also years of increased isolation and ostracism for the family. Louis was a fugitive by 1874 and the sudden and unfortunate ending of his political career created much suspicion and resentment in the family and in the Métis community. The uneasiness was partly real and possibly also exaggerated in their anxious state of minds. It was reflected in their comments about Mgr Taché, a benefactor and life long friend and Joseph Dubuc, a former classmate of Louis and his ardent supporter and promoter in the early years of the province. Mme Julie wrote to Louis in 1875 "... Peut-être que M. Dubuc n'oublie pas ses parents, mais pour ses amis, il les a déjà oubliés. Il n'y pense plus. Ils n'ont plus la même façon qu'ils avaient avec nous."15
Strong religious convictions, upheld by daily assistance at mass, constant prayer and an almost fatalistic acceptance of life's tribulations and sorrows also characterized the family. Octavie's marriage to Louis Lavallée in 1875, and Eulalie's marriage to William Gladu in 1879 strengthened the family ties. As customary both daughters left home and spent some time with their husband's family before establishing a separate residence. When Louis Riel came to St-Joe (Dakota) in the spring of 1879, all the family visited him and a strong friendship developed between Louis and his brother-in-law, Lavallée. The latter wrote "... oui cher beau-frère, depuis que j'ai eu le bonheur de vous voir il ne se passe pas une journée sans que mon coeur aille souffrir avec vous dans l'exil."16

Little is known of the social pastimes or activities of the family except for the frequent visiting and veillées. Extended visits from the family were customary; au Jour de l'An and at feast such as la Sainte Catherine, Mardi Gras and la St-Jean Baptiste (replaced by Fête Nationale des Métis in 1880's). The Riels maintained close ties with the Lagimodières, particularly aunts La Cyprès (Josephte Nault), Reine Lamère and uncles La Prairie (Jean-Baptiste), Benjamin and Romain. Cousins Nanin (André Nault), Paul Proulx and Charles Sauvé were also frequent visitors. The Lépine and Parenteau families, ardent supporters of Louis, remained close associates.

In September 1879, Louis Riel left the St-Joe - Pembina community, travelling further west and wintering among the Métis at Flat Willow on the Beaver river in the Montana Territory.17 The final departure left Joseph
and Henriette in charge of the home while the younger Alexandre attended college briefly in St-Boniface. The early 1880's were years of consolidation and change in the home and family. Although these were also years of spoliation of Métis lands and lack of markets for grain crops, the Riel family's standard of living improved. The extension of the family through marriage, particularly with the Poitras family, appears to have strengthened their economic position. Joseph and Alexandre wished to join Louis in Montana where a life of hunting and trading seemed more exciting and certainly more profitable. But the dream was not realized and by 1884, both had families and were established in St-Vital. Louis Riel returned to the family home in 1883 to attend sister Henriette's wedding and to settle some financial matters.19 He was living at St-Peter's Mission in Montana where he was teaching. Marguerite and his young son Jean did not accompany him. During his short one month sojourn he met with old friends L.A. Prud'homme, J. Dubuc and other prominent French-Canadian members of the St-Jean-Baptiste Society. But he felt ill at ease and rejected, preferring the company of his Métis friends and family living in St-Vital and surrounding parishes. Louis' mistrust made him decline an invitation to attend a concert and banquet of the Society of which he had been Vice-President.20 He replied:

... veuillez croire que je suis sensible à l'honneur que vous me faites. Si je pouvais prendre part à la fête de la Nation Métisse - Canadienne-Française, je me rendrais certainement au concert et au banquet auxquels vous avez la bonté de m'inviter. Excusez-moi ... 21
Later, in a letter to Joseph, Louis summed up the reaction to his presence in Manitoba in the summer of 1883. "... L'an dernier, personne ne voulait de moi dans les cercles politiques influents du Manitoba ..." He had been absent for almost ten years. Politically he was a liability and in his absence the leadership of the French-speaking and Catholic community had been assumed by others.

Louis' frustrated sense of leadership and disillusionment upon perceiving the disaggregation of the Métis in Manitoba probably influenced his decision to accompany a delegation of Saskatchewan Métis to Batoche in the summer of 1884. He was elated by the support of both Métis and Halfbreeds (as well as English-speaking whites) of the Saskatchewan district and vowed to assist them:

Dieu l'a voulu, j'ai changé de place... Cette année le peuple s'élève à ma parole ... le ler juillet nous étions au milieu des établissements métis de ce pays. J'ai été reçu à bras ouverts par tout le monde... Voilà deux grandes assemblées que les anglais font et auxquelles ils m'ont invité et où j'ai pris la parole. Louis' plan at the time was to assist the Métis in their representations to the Territorial and Federal governments and return to Montana in the fall. Land claims and political representation were foremost in their long list of demands. But political machinery and bureaucracy were slow to react and replies when any were largely evasive. Leading Métis in the community, among whom Gabriel Dumont, Charles Nolin, Maxime Lépine and Moïse Ouellette, all implored Riel to remain among them until redress of grievances or satisfaction was obtained. An analysis of the outbreak which occurred
in March 1885 and which Canadian historians have referred to as the "North West Rebellion" is largely beyond the scope of this study. But as far as Louis Riel's role in the protest movement which resulted in an armed uprising by the Métis, there is little doubt of his sincerity and commitment to the cause of his people. The unsuccessful outcome was particularly destructive for Riel personally. The Métis living in the Batoche, St-Laurent and Duck Lake district were imprisoned, slandered and persecuted but Riel had to bear the collective responsibility and stigma for the resort to arms.

The failure of the "movement" as the Métis termed it, Riel's subsequent surrender, imprisonment and mock trial in Regina were devastating blows to the Métis in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. But to the Riel family in St-Vital, they were particularly tragic. Nevertheless, as before, the family, without exception, rallied to his defense. They never questioned the righteousness of his actions nor doubted his innocence of the charges against him. Even in the face of a general outcry in the community against Louis' unorthodox and "heretical" religious views, the family was steadfast. Although a devout Catholic, Mme Julie Riel was not intimidated by the clergy's condemnation of Louis' religious declarations. In her mind and to most of the Métis, it was all part of a larger vision or perspective of things and in harmony with Louis' mission and destiny. Henriette expressed the feelings and position of the family in the following unequivocal terms:

... Hier il y a eu une grande messe recommandée par les gens de St-Vital pour toi... Les Soeurs sont à l'épouvante de la religion, pauvres innocentes. Ils te croient égaré à tout jamais. Et tout le reste s'en sent tu peux croire. Il paraît que notre évêque [Mgr Taché] bouleverse tout pour je ne sais où aboutir. Mais il travaille pour caler ses chers ouailles métis. Mgr va si souvent à Rome que nous mêmes nous en sommes toutes abasourdies... Toute la famille se joint à moi pour t'embrasser, te chérir, t'aimer...

In the course of the trials of the Métis arrested at Batoche and more specifically Louis', there was a distinct shift of opinion in the French-speaking community in Manitoba. The initial unequivocal condemnation of an insurrection against a constituted authority was replaced by some sympathy for the "poor ignorant Métis" who had been duped by their fanatical leaders. Editorials in Le Manitoba, a Conservative newspaper, echoed such sentiments in June, 1885 while attempting to minimize and defend the actions of Government. But as eyewitness reports of burning and looting by the militia came through, circumspection was replaced by outrage. Criticism of Riel focused on his religious views but illness or a deranged mind became the stand-by for his unacceptable behaviour. Further sympathy and support were expressed during the trial and particularly after news of the promulgation of the death penalty. But all in all there was an uneasiness in the minds of many French-Canadians in Manitoba, perhaps reinforced by the uncompromising and critical attitude of the clergy. The Métis offered few opinions on the matter. They were as circumspect as ever except among themselves. There is little doubt that few were disturbed by Riel's religious views. In the Saskatchewan district military defeat left the Métis in disarray. There was much initial grumbling,
some denunciations and resentment against Dumont and Riel. But they occurred in an atmosphere of deprivation and fear of reprisals that followed. The execution of Louis Riel on November 16, 1885 had a profound impact on the Métis community. It provoked a retrenchment, a quasi isolation in the face of an ultimate affront. It was not a reaction fully understood nor fully shared by their French-Canadian compatriots. 27

During this period and the aftermath of the execution, the family exhibited particular resolution and solidarity. Apart from repeated assurances of faith and support communicated to Louis, the fate of Marguerite and the two children became a major concern of the Riel family. Joseph travelled to Batoche to fetch them in June. They had apparently been sheltered by a cousin, Cuthbert (Corbert) Fayant, 28 but were in a pitiful state of health. The ravages of war and its accompanying misery had not escaped them. Henriette reported their safe arrival at St-Vital to Louis in the following terms: "... Joseph est arrivé le 22 lundi avec Marguerite, ses deux enfants... Marguerite est maigre, changée dit-on. Il paraît qu'elle a craché le sang durant 3 jours à Batoche." 29 The children were in better health, although Angélique was thin and weak. "... Les enfants sont très alertes. Jean joue du matin au soir aussi est-ce à force de fatigue qu'il s'endort, il est gros et gras; la petite Angélique a été un peu indisposée après son arrivée ... elle a beaucoup maigrie ..." 30 There was much anxiety on the part of Mme Julie over Marguerite's condition. Fear over her ability to carry her pregnancy to term increased. It seems that Marguerite had miscarried in the winter of 1884-85. "... Marguerite est triste,
abattue, elle est atterrée ... Si elle ne prend garde à elle il pourra lui arriver malheur. Comme l'hiver dernier, depuis 8 jours qu'elle est malade." 

Notwithstanding, she demonstrated much courage, strength and resignation in the face of such adversity. "... elle a l'air bien mal, on lui demande comment elle est, elle nous dit qu'elle est bien, c'est quand elle n'en peut plus qu'elle le dit..." 

Joseph visited his brother in Regina at the end of August and again in October. On one occasion Mme Julie and Jean accompanied him. 

Louis' relationship with his wife, Marguerite, has been the object of much speculation. According to G.F.G. Stanley, she was a self-effacing, illiterate young Métisse who worshipped Louis. In contrast, his feeling towards her were based on affection rather than love. 

There is no strong basis to confirm the latter statement although the character of their relationship remains elusive. There was certainly a strong and deeply religious commitment on Louis' part. His letters to her from prison substantiate this. In August he wrote:

Ma chère et bonne Marguerite. Tu peux penser si je me suis informé de ta santé et de nos chers petits enfants ... sois courageuse ... le Bon Dieu qui nous a fait sortir sans une égratignure des dangers effrayants du dernier jour de combat à Batoche, est toujours le même ... Embrasse nos petits enfants pour moi. 

The letter also suggests an almost fatherly concern for a wife seventeen years younger than him. It would be unfair to evaluate their relationship on the basis of a few letters written in a period of trauma and crisis. The situation also contrasted sharply with the circumstances of his meeting and correspondence with Evelina Barnabé. Marguerite, like most wives of her time, was submissive and self-sacrificing. She does not seem to have possessed the independent spirit or
determination of Madeleine Wilkie, wife of Gabriel Dumont. But she was also perhaps more naïve or less experienced and it is unfair to interpret her reservation for weakness. By the summer of 1885, she was already suffering from the debilitating effects of consumption. In October, she lost a much wanted child at birth. In November, after four reprieves, her husband was executed. In one of his last letters to Marguerite, following the first stay of execution in September, Louis reiterated his love and concern for his young family. To Marguerite, he offered these parting words: "... Que le Bon Dieu soit avec toi ma chère Marguerite. Je suis ton mari pour la vie, ton mari qui t'aime, Louis "David" Riel."

The profound grief he experienced at the news of the death of his newborn son, was equalled only by his anxiety for Marguerite. He was confident, however, that she would be sustained in this and all her sorrows since she had received a special blessing in Fort Benton. He wrote to Henriette:

Tu peux croire si ta dernière lettre m'a pris au coeur. La confiance en Dieu adoucit mon inquiétude au sujet de Marguerite. Car elle a été bénie selon les vues de la Providence qui sont aimables et sans mesure. C'est le prêtre de Benton qui lui a donné cette précieuse bénédiction... La douleur que j'éprouve de voir que mon petit m'a été enlevé, sans que j'aie pu l'embrasser, sans que j'aie pu le couvrir de ma tendresse, pénètre jusqu'au fond de mon âme... Ecrivez-moi encore bientôt. Donnez-moi des nouvelles de ma bien chère Marguerite.

Louis thanked his family for their unwavering support and assistance.
As the day of execution drew nearer he expressed particular concern over his numerous debts and inability to provide for his family. He appointed Father Alexis André as his religious and literary executor, entrusting him with his papers and last wishes as to the conveyance of his body to St-Vital and internment besides his father in St-Boniface. This "religious" testament does not delve into any financial matters. Surviving bits of correspondence, in transcribed form, deposited at the Société historique de St-Boniface elaborate upon his financial woes and conviction that the Government [as his executioner] would have ensuing responsibility towards his family.

... [qu]'une indemnité soit obtenue en faveur de ma femme et de mes enfants. En justice, le gouvernement de la Puissance ne me doit pas moins qu'un million de piastres, sans parler de la dette qu'il contracte vis-à-vis de moi, devant Dieu et devant les hommes pour m'avoir condamné à mort.

If such compensation was obtained, he promised to erect a chapel in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and another in honour of the Sacred Heart of Mary. He entrusted his wife, family and in particular Father André, with the fulfillment of this promise. The money would also be applied to debts amounting to over $1300.

J'ai des dettes que je désire payer. Je dois
- aux héritiers de mon très généreux bienfaiteur, le défunt M. Fabien Barnabé $250 avec intérêt depuis 1878.
- à M. Crawford et McCloughlin, Benton, Montana, $80 et l'intérêt à 12% depuis sept. 1884.
- à M. Joseph Hipp (Marion (?) ), Montana, $400.
- aux héritiers de la Maison du défunt Edouard Gauthier, tailleur, Montréal, la somme d'environ $150 avec intérêt depuis vingt ans.
- à mon beau-père [Jean Monet dit Bellehumeur] au moins une centaine de piastres, deux cents piastres et plus.
- à mon oncle François Bellehumeur une centaine de piastres.
- à Louis St-Mathe au moins cent piastres avec intérêt.
- à M. Jeannot (?) Lewistown, une dizaine de piastres.
- à M. Edouard Marion, un pistolet de $25.
- à M. Martineau au moins une vingtaine de piastres.
- au Dr Lapalme de Lewistown, Montana, $25 avec intérêt, mars 1883.

Je demande pardon du mal dont je me suis rendu coupable, en contractant ces dettes et du dommage volontaire ou involontaire que j'ai causé en ne les payant. Mon grand désir est que ces dettes soient payées. 44

Shortly after Louis' execution on November 16, 1885, Charles Sauvé 45 and Louis Lavallée went to Regina to claim the body and supervise its transfer to St-Boniface. Riel's body rested temporarily under the floor boards of the small Catholic chapel. Sauvé, Lavallée and Pascal Bonneau 46 kept a round the clock vigil, reporting on the situation and progress of the negotiations to the family in St-Vital. Louis' trial and execution had aroused enough animosity in English-speaking Canada to fear reprisals, even profanation of the body. Louis' last wishes concerning his funeral and burial were conveyed to the Canadian Government. In the hope of speeding the negotiations, Mgr Taché dispatched abbé Cloutier to Regina and attempted personally to persuade the Government to act on this matter. 47 In Regina, Lieutenant-Governor Edgar Dewdney procrastinated and sought specific instructions from Ottawa. In the meantime, Sauvé and Lavallée maintained their peaceful vigil.

... On a pas encore été inquiété. Tout le monde est tranquille ici. On veille tard ordinairement. On se couche dans l'église le reste de la nuit. Notre lit est au dessous du corps. Personne peut se rendre au corps sans faire du bruit, soit par dehors ou par dedans. 48
They reported to the family on the appearance of the body, being somewhat amazed at its state of preservation and noting that much of Louis' hair had been cut as souvenirs.

... Il n'a aucune mauvaise senteur ... on s'est mis la tête dans le cercueil en le découvrant pour voir ... C'est vrai qu'il est à demi gelé. Son corps n'est pas du tout enflé. Sa figure est belle ... Je crois que son cou est cassé. Ses yeux sont à demi ouverts. Une chose que nous pensons d'avoir oubliée dans tous nos lettres [sic], c'est de vous dire que notre cher Louis a beaucoup de cheveux coupés.49

Arrangements were finally concluded and the funeral cortège travelled to St-Boniface secretly, mostly at night, courtesy of the CPR. On December 9, the body was returned to the family in St-Vital amidst certain discord. In a journal of these events written in 1907-1908, Joseph Riel recalled the confrontation between Mgr Taché and the family at the archbishop's residence. Mme Julie reportedly had to plead for her son's body and it would appear that the already strained relations between the Archbishop and the Riel family suffered a complete breakdown.50 There was certainly cause for some resentment on the part of the much injured and grief-stricken family. In their eyes, Riel's death was a betrayal on the part of the clergy.51 To label him a madman was adding insult to injury. Conversely, Mgr Taché appears to have been greatly disillusioned by both Government and Métis in 1885. He could not be expected, in the context of 19th century Catholic ideology and practice, to understand or even tolerate Louis Riel's religious views. Politically, he also believed that the Conservative Party (in the Liberal-
Conservative tradition of Macdonald-Cartier best represented and safeguarded the interests of the Catholic and French-speaking population.\textsuperscript{52}

Riel's body laid in state in the family home on December 10 and 11. On the 12, the mile long funeral cortège, Métis compatriots bearing Louis' casket on their shoulders, made its way to St-Boniface cathedral, a distance of over six kilometres. Threats of attack by Orangemen in Winnipeg resulted in most Métis men concealing arms in the event of such a disruption.

Des Métis en capot du pays, croque de castor et ceinture fléchée, portèrent le cercueil sur leurs épaules, sur les 6 milles [sic] de distance de la maison à la cathédrale, où Mgr Taché l'attendait. Un cortège de 75 traineaux, dont le premier était occupé par la mère, la veuve et les soeurs de Riel, suivait, escorté d'une double file de Métis formant garde du corps...\textsuperscript{53}

Among the pallbearers were Louis' cousin André Nault and uncles Joseph and Romain Lagimodière. Abbé A. Dugas celebrated the funeral mass, assisted by abbés Cloutier and Messier.\textsuperscript{54} Riel was buried besides his father as he had wished. A simple marker identified the grave site until 1891, when the Union Nationale Métisse de St-Joseph erected a monument.\textsuperscript{55}

The execution of Louis Riel had profound political repercussions particularly on the national scene. Reaction among French-Canadians in Manitoba was limited and elected representatives such as Joseph Royal refused to approve motions of censure against the Conservative Government.\textsuperscript{56} In Québec, however, the reaction was dramatic. The event was seized upon by the Liberal Honoré Mercier who recruited \textit{nationalistes} among the
Conservatives to form a new party, a Parti National.\textsuperscript{57} The indignation of the Québécois at the martyr of a compatriote was genuine if somewhat belated and at times exploited. The mass assembly on the Champ de Mars on November 22, 1885, voted resolutions condemning the execution of Riel and vowed vengeance. J.A. Macdonald was burned in effigy and Conservative Ministers Chapleau, Langevin and Caron who refused to resign from the Government were branded as traitors. Emotions rang high and there was little compromise by either party. Although the Ministers from Québec did not offer their resignation to Sir John, there is no doubt that Riel's execution was the beginning of the end for that party in Québec. The compact between Macdonald and Cartier which had provided the basis for the Confederation of Upper and Lower Canada in 1867, had been broken.

A more sensitive and practical reaction to Louis Riel's execution in Québec was expressed by a series of subscriptions established to assist his widow and orphaned children.\textsuperscript{58} Committees were organized across the province and although the total amount collected remains unclear, it was around $3000. Most of the contributions were forwarded to Bishop Taché who was entrusted with its distribution to the family. Marguerite Riel received a sum of money in 1885 and another disbursement in early 1886.\textsuperscript{59} Another portion of the money was invested through the purchase of shares in La Banque du Peuple.\textsuperscript{60} This appears to have been the children's share. The family never received that portion of the money, as the bank went bankrupt. The whole question occasioned much anxiety and conflict
between Bishop Taché and the Riel family. Fuelled by inquiries from contributors in Québec and seemingly uninformed on the disposal of outstanding monies, the family grew resentful and remained convinced that they had been cheated.61

Among other assistance from Québec was the offer of life long support by the Montréal committee to Mmes Julie and Marguerite and the two Riel children if they would move to Montréal.62 Although this suggestion was somewhat impractical it was given some consideration by Mme Julie who had many relatives in the Montréal area. The same committee was responsible for the publication of a selection of Riel's poems under the title Poésies Religieuses et politiques in early 1886.

The local Métis community voiced few comments or remained circumspect in the aftermath of Riel's execution. The shock and profound grief experienced by the Métis population was not easily discernable by outsiders, according to Joseph Dubuc, a former classmate and friend.

... L'exécution a produit un malaise sérieux. Tout le monde en était saisi, péniblement impressionné. Je parle des Canadiens. Quant aux Métis, je suis persuadé qu'il en ont été profondément affectés. Mais vous les connaissez; ça n'y paraissait pas...63

Although they remained active in federal and provincial politics, most Métis ceased to support the Conservative Party after 1885. In the Federal election of 1887, the Liberal candidate for Provencher, J. Ernest Cyr, received strong support in the Métis parishes, particularly in St-Vital and Ste-Anne-des-Chênes. At the provincial level, the Métis were represented by Liberals
Martin Jérôme (Carillon) and William Lagimodière (La Vérendrye) throughout most of the 1880's and 1890's. Joseph and Alexandre Riel both played an active role in politics and in Métis associations. Alexandre served as President of the St-Vital chapter of the Union Nationale Métisse de St-Joseph de Manitoba which was founded at the home of Joseph St-Germain in St-Vital in 1887. Joseph and Alexandre were both founding members of the Comité historique (later Société historique métisse) established in 1910. Its mandate was to collect testimonies to vincicate the actions of Louis Riel and the Métis in 1869-70 and in 1885. Joseph served as municipal councillor and postmaster at St-Vital for many years. The St-Vital East post office was opened in his home in 1899 and after a number of unsuccessful petitions by Joseph, the Post Office was re-named Riel in 1908.64

Day to day life in the Riel home resumed its tragic course after Louis' death. Marguerite and the two children, Jean and Angélique, continued to reside with Mme Julie and Joseph's family. Marguerite succombed to the combined rigours of disease and intense emotional trauma in the spring of 1886. She died of consumption in May at the age of 25. Her premature death was viewed as a deliverance and in a written eulogy to her sister-in-law, Henriette, a correspondent, abbé Vaudry, declared:

Une adorable Providence vient donc de réunir la noble épouse à son cher et héroïque époux! ... La séparation était un supplice auquel Dieu, le grand, l'unique consolateur, a voulu mettre un terme. Vous aimez trop votre soeur pour ne pas remercier Notre Seigneur d'avoir abrégé le cours d'une vie qui n'eut été qu'une longue agonie.65
Jean and Angélique remained with their grandmother after the death of their mother. Henriette Riel and husband Jean-Marie Poitras moved to St-Vital and resided in a house next door to Mme Julie in the 1890's. Henriette was particularly involved with the care of Louis' two children and it appears that she was responsible for their early elementary education. Mme Julie made extended visits to her other daughters, Octavie (living near-by on Seine frontage of lot 50), and Eulalie (who lived in St-Pierre-Jolys) during those years, perhaps bringing Jean and Angélique along, or leaving them in the care of Henriette. Although the grandmother's principal residence was Joseph's home on River Road, she often "wintered" at the Lagimodièreres around St-Pierre and at Joseph's farm at St-Malo. Octavie's sudden death in 1890 brought the added concern for the welfare of the young Lavallée children. Joseph was also left with three small children when his wife died in 1892. He remarried in 1894 but in the interval it is probable that Mme Julie, assisted by Henriette took care of Louis and Joseph's children.

Jean and Angélique attended class at St-Vital in the 1890's. Little is known about Angélique except that she was a pretty blond blue-eyed "angel" whom her father had adored. In a letter to an uncle and aunt in 1895, at the age of 12, she also appears to be a bright and sensitive young girl. As many children of her time who were subject to an early death by typhoid fever (fièvre), whooping cough (grippe) and other epidemics, she died of diphteria in 1897 near
the age of 14. Henriette Riel-Poitras died from childbirth complications in August, 1898. Jean became Louis' sole descendant. He and Angélique had been unusually close. Her premature death appears to have removed any obstacles to the furthering of his education or his departure from St-Vital. Around the same time, their grandmother moved to her younger son Alexandre's residence on lot 50. Alexandre was widowed in 1903 and she remained with him until her death in May, 1906.68

Among the benefactors who maintained contact with the Riel family in the years after 1885 were Alfred Pelland and Honoré Mercier.69 When the former Premier of Québec died in 1894, Jean and Angélique Riel wrote a letter of condolence which deeply touched the Mercier family. Mrs. Mercier replied:

De toutes les marques de sympathies que j'ai reçu, la vôtre est bien celle qui m'a été le plus au coeur ... Et si vous priez pour le repos de l'âme de mon pauvre mari, vous ferez en cela que remettre à mes enfants et à moi ce que nous avons fait pour votre bonne maman. Permettez que je vous donne à tous deux un baiser reconnaissant.70

Honoré Mercier fils resumed correspondence with the family after his father's death. In 1897, soon after Angélique's death, he reiterated his concern for Jean. He inquired about his plans for college or a higher education and indicated that he wanted to assist him.71 Mercier then wrote to Jean personally forwarding him some books. Jean attended Collège St-Boniface in 1899-1900, possibly in Eléments Latins (grade 10 level) but most probably in the commercial course.72 He obtained an honourable mention in conduct and application. Mercier, Pelland, Beaugrand
and other benefactors subsidized him. Jean experienced some initial difficulty at the collège, probably because of the lateness of his arrival and some untimely sickness. But his patrons were pleased with his progress. Pelland congratulated Jean and informed him of further educational plans.

... Je vois avec plaisir tes bonnes dispositions pour l'étude. J'espère que ta santé est maintenant rétablie... Nous n'avons pas encore complètement décidé à quel collège tu iras, ni si tu viendras à Montréal ou ailleurs. Cependant, nous ne tarderons pas à prendre une décision qui sera pour ton plus grand bien...73

In the meantime he counselled Jean to remain at home (at his uncle Joseph's) and to contact a mutual friend, Noé Chevrier, in Winnipeg on the matter. Like his father some forty years earlier, Jean was destined to study in Montréal. In 1902, he was attending the Ecole Normale Jacques Cartier.74 To avoid any possible attacks, as some still feared for the safety of the son of Louis Riel, particularly when travelling through Ontario, Jean assumed the surname of his mother, Monet. He spent almost three years at the Ecole Normale, two years in the preparatory course.75 He felt little inclination for such a profession and in 1904 he advised his family that he hoped to leave the school and return to Manitoba. He was homesick for les grandes plaines de l'Ouest.76 But Jean was also deeply appreciative of the assistance given to him. He was evidently getting favoured treatment at the Ecole Normale and benefitting from the support of high-placed friends. He wrote:
... Mes amis sont très bons pour moi aussi il ne me manque jamais de rien. Ils me servent je pourrais dire comme un Roi... Nous sommes sur une table qui est différente aux autres, de plus je ne couche pas au dortoir avec les autres, j'ai une chambre à moi seul...

In 1905, Jean left the Ecole Normale to work with Mr. Pelland in the Department of Colonization, Ministry of Mines and Fisheries, in Québec City. At first he felt particularly lonesome in that city as he had few friends. But he preferred his new employment as a cartographer in the Surveys Branch. In 1906 he was accepted as an apprentice civil engineer. In 1906, he transferred to the Ministry of Lands and Forests. He was quite enthusiastic about his new profession, more confident about his future and happily integrated to the Québec milieu. He expressed these thoughts to his cousin, Pierre Lavallée:

... Je me suis fait des projets assez difficiles c'est à dire étudier pour le "Génie Civil." Je ne sais si je pourrais réussir... Je suis courageux, en bonne santé comme j'ai jamais été. J'ai beaucoup d'amis qui sont toujours heureux de me protéger. Il en tient qu'à moi d'être assidu et persévérant dans mes études... Tu peux être sûr, que ce sera ainsi, tout mon énergie. Je dois partir bientôt, en explorations pour des mines, avec des Ingénieurs du Gouvernement. Avant de terminer, laisse-moi te dire que je m'ennuie plus à Québec. Je crois que je vais demeurer pour le reste de mes jours à Québec...

He added, not without humour, that he hoped to take a trip to Manitoba in the summer, "pour aller voir les amis et les petites filles métis [sic]."
Jean had adapted well to his new employment and surroundings, demonstrating that he had overcome the handicap of a "late starter." He was reportedly also an avid reader. The impression, through his correspondence in 1906-1908, is that he had become a mature and quite sophisticated young man. He was reserved by nature, not at all outspoken or flamboyant like his father. Jean worshipped the memory of his father whom he hoped one day to be in a position to defend and honour. In 1903 he obtained letters of administration as the sole heir and descendant of Louis Riel "who had died intestate leaving property or value of not more than $1000." By this act, he inherited the Halfbreed Scrip and right of pre-emption of his father who had never taken possession of nor disposed of his claim.

According to one account in 1908, Jean Riel was a typical handsome young Mêtis, tall (over 6 feet) and stocky, with the black hair and dark eyes of his mother. Popular with women, he courted and won the heart of Laura Casault, member of a prominent Québec City family. Laura and Jean were married in the cathédrale St-Jean-Baptiste de Québec on the 25th of March, 1908.

In the meantime, Jean had obtained employment as an engineer with the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway Company. One of the attractions of the job was that he would be working in Manitoba on the construction of that line. Jean and Laura arrived at the Riel home in St-Vital in early April, 1908. Jean was based at the railway camp some twelve miles away and Laura remained with Joseph and his family. They were reunited at St-Vital during the week-ends. On his return home with a friend, in late June, the buggy
overturned and Jean suffered a serious rib fracture. It was a freak accident, which at first was not judged serious. He convalesced at home for over two weeks. But what was first thought have have been an abcess developed into a serious condition.

Ses doigts devinrent noirs comme du charbon. Il fut question d'amputation et il fut transporté à l'hôpital de St-Boniface. On parla d'amputation mais le mal dont il souffrait, était, malheureusement, trop avancé... Dès le lendemain de son entrée il eut une attaque de paralysie, puis perdit la vue et le 31 juillet, six jours après son admission, il mourait.

The official cause of death was endocardite maligne (acute inflammation of the heart). Jean himself must have had a premonition of the gravity of his condition as on July 8 he had written a letter to Honoré J. Jaxon (alias William Henry Jackson, Louis Riel's former secretary at Batoche in 1885) asking him to undertake the obligation he would not be able to achieve.

Je sens que je n'en ai pas pour longtemps à vivre; mais je vous prie d'écrire l'histoire de la rébellion de 1885, au Nord-Ouest, parce que vous avez été témoin oculaire et vous pourrez dire la vérité.

Jean Riel was buried near his father in the St-Boniface cathedral cemetery. He left no descendants.

Thus ended another tragic chapter in the annals of the history of the Riel family. But more important the "spirit" of Louis and the conviction of the righteousness of his "mission" never died in their minds and hearts.
Endnotes


2 PAM, MG3, D1, Letter 5, Louis Riel to his family, 23 February 1864.

3 Lucie Riel, Louis Riel père's younger sister, married John Lee in Montréal in 1849. She corresponded with the Riel family in St-Vital although she never came to Manitoba. Louis Riel's grandfather, Jean-Baptiste Riel dit l'Irlande, came to Red River and resided at St-François-Xavier with his son François between ca. 1858 and 1865. He died in Montréal in 1868.

4 He spent a few months at the office of Laflamme in 1866. He had previously corresponded with Laflamme's adversary and pro-Confederationist, G.E. Cartier, sending him verses. It is believed that Cartier never responded to Louis' letters. See Martel et al., *Louis Riel: Poésies de Jeunesse*, p. 20-21.

5 On June 12, 1866, Louis Riel and Marie-Julie Guernon signed a marriage contract. But her parents vehemently opposed her marriage to a Métis. The relationship was broken, an event which precipitated his departure from Montréal.
Louis left Montréal on June 19, 1866. He first travelled to St-Paul, Minnesota, remaining in that district for two years. In July 1868, he left St-Anthony, Minnesota for St-Joseph (St-Joe), Dakota, returning to St-Boniface. See G. Martel et al., *Louis Riel: Poésies de Jeunesse*, Chronologie, p. v. Riel reportedly traded and worked as a store clerk during this interval. In a letter to W.F. Bryant, in 1887, Bishop Taché wrote that "he [Louis Riel] tried in the West all sorts of business, and failed to secure any success. In 1868 he came back to his native land and remained with his family until the trouble of 1869." Cited in W.F. Bryant, *The Blood of Abel*, Gazette Journal Co., Hastings Nebraska, 1887, p. 43.

Louis was forcefully committed to the St-Jean-de-Dieu asylum at Longue-Pointe in March 1876. In May he was transferred to St-Michel-Archange asylum at Beauport where he remained until January 23, 1878. See G. Martel et al., *op. cit.*, Chronologie, p. vi.

Louis remained with the Barnabés in Keeseville until December 1878. In the spring, he had become secretly engaged to Father Fabien Barnabé's sister, Evelina. They continued to correspond after his departure for Montana (via the Dakotas). But Riel may have doubted her ability to adjust to life on the western plains had she joined him. She may have confirmed these fears to Louis in a letter she wrote in May 1879. But their correspondence and her reaction to the news of his marriage in 1882 confirms her love. See G.F.G. Stanley, *Louis Riel*, Toronto, Ryerson, 1963, chapter 12, pp. 228-232.
9 Le Métis, 21 December 1871.

10 PAM, MG3, Dl, Letter 209, Sr Marguerite Marie to her mother, St-Bruno, 27 August 1873.

11 Ibid., Letter 42, Sr Riel to Louis, St-Norbert, 19 Sept. 1870.

12 There were no letters during his sojourns at the mental hospitals, in 1876 and 1877.

13 PAM, MG3, D2, M. Joseph Lemay to Mme Julie Riel, St-Norbert, 27 August 1875. Demeules was a real estate agent in St-Paul.

14 PAM, MG3, Dl, Letter 47, Sr Sara Riel to her sisters, St-Boniface, 13 October 1870.

15 PAM, MG3, D2, Mme Julie to Louis, St-Vital, 2 April 1875.

16 Ibid., Louis Lavallée to Louis Riel, St-Vital, 4 May 1879.

17 Ibid., Louis to his mother, Fort Belknap, 12 October 1879.

His visit was reported in the Winnipeg Sun, Manitoba Free Press and Le Manitoba. He tried unsuccessfully to sell his lands as well as Marguerite's and her uncle, François Monet. ASHSB, Coll. Riel, Louis Riel to Roger Goulet, St-Vital, 9 July 1883.


Ibid., Louis Riel to L.A. Prud'homme, St-Vital, 25 January [sic] [June], 1883, copy.


Ibid.

ASHSB, Coll. Riel, Henriette to Louis, 30 June 1885.

Le Manitoba, editorials between June and August, 1885.

The clergy condemned the actions of Louis Riel and the Métis in 1885. There was sympathy for the grievances of the Métis and criticism of the Government but a resort to arms against established authority could not be condoned. Riel's new religion and mission were considered to be the fruit of a "deranged" mind. Bishops Taché and Grandin and the missionaries in the North-West felt disillusioned over their loss of ascendancy over the Métis. In many ways it was the religious aspect of Riel's revolt that provoked the most censure in the predominantly Catholic ultramontane milieu.
Dubuc remarked that whereas the French-Canadian population had expressed overt shock and grief, the Métis including the Riel family, had not left their homes on the fateful day. He also noted that the Métis were not as generous as the French-Canadians in the contributions to a subscription on Mrs. Riel's behalf. He added that the Métis had set up a subscription to obtain Riel's body from the Government, a gesture he found somewhat ridiculous. Dubuc, of course, was reacting to the accusation of the nationalistes in Québec. He deplored and resented their declarations that French-Canadians who refused to openly censure the Macdonald Government were vendus and pendards. PAM, MG14, B26, Joseph Dubuc to Elie Tassé, 29 November 1885.

PAM, MG3, D2, Joseph Riel to Corbet (Cuthbert) Fayant, 18 August 1885. In this letter, Joseph is thanking him for the care he gave to Louis' wife and children, particularly at a time of general distress and deprivation.

ASHSB, Coll. Riel, Henriette to Louis, 30 June 1885.

Ibid., 7 July 1885.

Ibid., 30 Sept. 1885.

Ibid., 15 Oct. 1885.

It is not clear if Marguerite visited Louis in Regina. When Joseph visited him in August, Louis wrote to Marguerite: "Tu peux penser si je me suis informé de ta santé et de nos chers petits enfants...", suggesting Marguerite had not accompanied him. PAM, MG3, D1, letter 426. She was sick and having a difficult pregnancy. Joseph, Nanin (André Nault)
and other members of the family went again to Regina in early October. ASHSB, Henriette to Louis, 30 Sept. and 15 October, 1885. However, G.F.G. Stanley in *Louis Riel*, chapter 19, note 12, p. 420 states that Mme Julie and Marguerite stayed with Pascal Bonneau's daughter when they visited Louis in August. The statement was based on correspondence with Z.M. Hamilton (husband of Miss Bonneau) in 1947. Abbé Cloutier had written to Bishop Taché: "Je viens d'avoir des nouvelles de Riel ... toute sa famille est allée le voir." (AASB, 10 Sept. 1885). This does not necessarily mean Marguerite and the children. Family correspondence states only that Joseph and others visited him. It is possible that Mrs. Hamilton confused Marguerite with Henriette or another of Riel's sisters. It seems more probable that only Mme Julie and Jean visited him.


35 PAM, MG3, D1, Letter 426.

36 Madeleine Wilkie was reportedly an enterprising and resolute woman to whom Gabriel entrusted much of the family's business. During their residence at Batoche between 1878 and 1884, she often accompanied the cart trains to Winnipeg while Gabriel remained behind to operate his store and ferry and pursue other trading activities. When Gabriel left for Montana in May 1885, she could not follow him immediately but did not hesitate to do so in the spring of 1886 even though she was already dying of tuberculosis.
37 ASHSB, Coll. Riel, Henriette to Louis, 24 October 1885. The son born on October 24 lived only a few hours. It seems that the child was born prematurely. Both Marguerite and Louis were grief stricken at his death. From Henriette's account, Marguerite demonstrated much strength and abnegation during this ordeal.

38 Ibid., Louis to Marguerite, 17 September 1885.

39 Ibid., Louis to Henriette, 26 October 1885.

40 McCord Museum, McGill University, Last wishes of Louis "David" Riel.

41 These notes may have been transcribed by abbé P. Picton from the Riel Papers when they were still at the Archdiocesan residence in the 1930's. They may also originate from Henriette Riel-Poitras' papers. In 1950, abbé A. Deschambault met with Jean-Marie Poitras (died 1950) and some of Henriette's papers were handed to him by Poitras' second wife (Rosalie Lagimodière) who survived him. I could not locate the originals of what appears to constitute a declaration by Riel of his assets, liabilities and last wishes regarding their disposition.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.
Ibid. It is doubtful these debts were ever paid. The Government awarded no compensation to the family. Later subscriptions, mainly from Québec, were specifically to assist Mme Julie, Marguerite and the two children. In a last effort to pay his debts and provide for his family, Louis entered into an agreement with F.L. Russell, photographer, at Regina on September 18, 1885. He was to receive a percentage of the sale and publication of a photograph of himself. It is not known if this contract was executed. Louis still owned property in Manitoba but land sales were poor in 1885.

Charles Sauvé (1859-1932) was a cousin and ardent supporter of Louis Riel. He was the son of Joseph Sauvé and Marie Dease who resided on lot 49, next door to the Riel family. He married Julie Larivière, daughter of François Larivière.

Pascal Bonneau was originally from Québec. He worked for the CPR and established the first store in Regina in 1882. He later returned to Québec where he died in 1902. His sons Pascal and Trefflé set up successful horse ranching establishments in the Willow-Bunch area. He was a friend of Riel if not an advocate of the armed resistance. Bonneau and his son were entrusted with the "care" of Riel's body. There is also a tradition among the Métis of Willow-Bunch [Talle de Saules] or Wood Mountain area that Bonneau had devised a plan for Louis Riel's escape (with the tacit approval of Macdonald and Dewdney) which failed due to denunciations by unsuspecting parties. Bonneau along with Sauvé and Lavallée accompanied Riel's body to St-Boniface.

PAM, MG3, D2, C. Sauvé and L. Lavallée to Riel family, Regina, 6 Dec. 1885.

Ibid., L. Lavallée to Octavie, Regina, 4 Dec. 1885.

Ibid., L. Lavallée to Henriette Poitras, Regina, 3 Dec. 1885.
50 Joseph Riel in a Journal written in 1907-1908, reported that on Dec. 9 Mme Julie "se mit a genoux devant Mgr implorant que le corps lui soit livrer à la maison. Mgr dit non ... dur. Finalement Charles Nault dit Vous avez sa vie Mgr, et nous aurons le corps et malgré vous ... nous avons assez de votre contrôle." PAM, MG3, D1, Doc. 616.

51 Rightly or wrongly, the Riel family blamed Bishop Taché, their friend and protector, for Louis' death. They believed that he was in collusion with the Government to dispose of Louis, a political and religious liability. Much of this feeling appears to date back to the events of 1869-70, especially to the amnesty promised to Riel, in good faith, by Bishop Taché. The Government had never fulfilled this promise.

52 Bishop Taché deplored Riel's execution. But he feared even more the resurgence of nationalisme and anticlericalism and the threat of a political upheaval. See A.A. Taché, "La Situation au Nord-Ouest," Québec, 1885.


54 Le Manitoba, 17 décembre 1885.

55 Funds for the monument came from friends in Montréal. Note of Joseph Riel in PAM, MG3, D2, box 4, misc. file.
Joseph Royal, MP for Provencher refused to support the Landry motion of March, 1886 which denounced the Government's approval of the execution of Louis Riel. Royal privately condemned Macdonald's action but feared that a vote of non confidence would bring about a greater evil: the defeat of the Conservatives and the ascension of the Liberals.

The Parti National as its name implied, was a nationalist party founded in the wake of Riel's execution. Liberal or Rouge leader Honoré Mercier obtained the support of the Nationalist Bleus (Conservatives) or Castors on the appeal of "fraternité du sang et de la race." He won the election of 1886 and became Premier of Québec in January 1887. Riel's execution also strengthened the position of the Federal Liberals under Wilfrid Laurier.

Numerous subscriptions were drawn up in Montréal and surrounding parishes as well as French-Canadian parishes in New York and Massachusetts.

A statement by Joseph Riel (PAM, MG3, D2, box 5) suggests that $925 was received by Mme Marguerite Riel between August 1885 and February 1886. Another statement signed by Bishop Taché suggests that 388.25 plus a balance of 274.15 for a total of 662.40 was paid to the Riel family. A condensed copy of this statement in the Archdiocesan Archives also gives a total amount of 662.40. It is possible that the Riel family received some of the monies directly which would account for the variance in figures.
PAM, MG3, D2, Copy of a certificate of investment in La Banque du Peuple certifying that twenty-six shares of $59 ($1300) have been invested by Jacques Grenier trustee for the children of Louis Riel. Dated Montréal, 2 May 1889.

The whole question remains unclear or open to various interpretations. The family believed that the total contributions entrusted to Bishop Taché were not disbursed. It is not known if they were informed of the investment in La Banque du Peuple. Correspondence between abbé G. Cloutier and Joseph Riel in 1920 suggests that some money is outstanding. Joseph, however, adamantly refuses to accept any settlement. Some money is subsequently forwarded to Laura Casault widow of Jean Riel. Laura (then Mrs. Nadeau) is corresponding with Amanda Riel (widow of Joseph) on this matter in 1924. She wishes to return to Mme Riel some of the money sent to her. Amanda Riel replies irrevocably in terms which suggest that there was indeed a guilty conscience somewhere. "... Je ne peux pas, moi non plus accepter l'argent qui reste des aumônes ... Tant pis pour ceux, qui, il y a bientôt 40 ans, ont dérobé à la Veuve et aux Orphelins ... Aujourd'hui parce que son successeur [à Mgr Taché] a donné ordre à ceux qui avaient trempé dans cette affaire, de le débarrasser de ça, à tout prix, qu'il rejette toute responsabilité sur ce qui a été fait devant lui, la famille Riel accepterait ce qui reste de ces aumônes patriotiques pour se payer des services rendus à un frère malheureux et à sa famille, ah non!..." She states that the family had received
$630 of the approximately $14,000 received by Bishop Taché in trust for Louis Riel's family. The latter sum appears inflated but there was evidently some money outstanding.

62 PAM, MG3, D2, Letter of Abraham Guay to Joseph Riel, Montréal, 23 January 1886. M. Guay a Métis from St-Boniface and a friend of the Riel family, had travelled to Montréal with the purpose of publishing some of Louis Riel's writings and a portrait recently sketched by C. Tauffenbach.

63 PAM, MG14, B26, Dubuc Papers, Joseph Dubuc to Elie Tassé, St-Boniface, 29 November, 1885.

64 The Postmaster General's office at first refused to name the Post Office Riel, on the basis that it would rekindle old prejudices.

65 PAM, MG3, D1, letter 442, Abbé T.A. Vaudry, to Mme Henriette Poitras, Brainerd Minn., 26 May 1886.

66 Municipal lists indicate they were residing on lot 51, by 1893 and probably earlier. They possibly moved to the former Lavallée home when Louis Lavallée closed his store and took up farming on lot 49, near Alexandre, around 1888.

67 Louis refers to his daughter in a letter to Marguerite on 17 September 1885. "Ma petite fille Marie-Angélique à ses deux ans, peut prononcer mon nom, avec une joie souriante d'espérance et de contentement. Béni soit donc le 17 septembre, jour de naissance pour notre petite..." ASHSB, Coll. Riel.
68 Mme Julie was living at Alexandre's in 1901. See letter to Joseph, 26 April 1901. PAM, MG3, D2, Box 1. She died at Alexandre's on January 22, 1906. See obituary in *Manitoba Free Press*, January 27, 1906. Alexandre Riel married his wife's sister, Bibiane Poitras, on August 2, 1906.

69 Though he was accused, particularly by his Conservative opponents, of exploiting Riel's execution for personal political gains, Honoré Mercier remained committed to the spirit of Riel's cause. More specifically he continued to correspond with the Riel family and assist them.

70 ASHSB, Coll. Riel, Mme Honoré Mercier to Jean and Angélique, Montréal, 2 Dec. 1894.


72 Jean is listed as a student at St-Boniface College in 1899 but his course of studies is not indicated. He had attended elementary school in St-Vital (near Riel house). It is not known what level of education he had completed before entering the collège but it was not extensive.

73 PAM, MG3, D2, J. Alfred Pelland to Jean Riel, Montréal, 31 August 1900.
Jean left to study in Montréal in 1901 or 1902.

Holmes responded to Robert Rumilly's unfavourable assessment of Jean Riel in Histoire de la Province de Québec, Louis Riel, Vol. 5, p. 174, note 1, published in 1941. Rumilly based his comments on unfavourable testimonies from Jean's professors at the Ecole Normale. They stated that Jean had little ability and in his two years at the school, had never obtained good grades. Rumilly also reported, erroneously, that Jean was lethargic, sickly (consumptive) and a drinker and that he had died of tuberculosis in Québec City. It is unfortunate that Rumilly never corrected these false and defamatory statements. A reprint of the volume in 1973 repeated the same falsehoods. Jean was little prepared for such a course, possessing only an elementary education and one year of a commercial course. The young man who had never left home must also have experienced quite a cultural shock when he arrived in Montréal. Jean's letters home attest to his studiousness and his determination to succeed. His early writing style corroborates a limited education but by 1906 it has definitely improved.
At the time one could obtain the title civil engineer without the formal professional training or diploma. A person could train on the job and the combined training and experience would entitle him to the practice of engineering.

ASHSB, Coll. Riel, Jean Riel to Pierre Lavallée, Québec, 5 May 1906.

Ibid. In a letter to uncle Joseph, August 24, 1906, Jean writes that he does not know when he will come to Winnipeg, probably for the next New Year.

It was a legacy of which he was very proud but that also weighed heavily upon him. By 1906 he is signing his name Jean Louis Riel.

Manitoba, Eastern Judicial District, Surrogate Court Declaration of Jean Riel re letter of administration as heir to Louis David Riel, Montréal, 13 July 1903. Friends Noé and Horace Chevrier posted bond and witnessed the affidavit. A letter of administration was received on August 13.

The land was the NE\textsuperscript{1} and E\textsuperscript{\frac{1}{2}} of NW\textsuperscript{\frac{1}{2}} of sec. 15 T5-2-E1.

Laura Casault was the daughter of the late Honoré Casault and Sophronie Fitzback. She was a nurse at the St-Luc Hospital in Québec City, a profession she resumed after Jean's death. On May 14, 1912, she married Ernest Nadeau.
Details of the incident are given by Charles Holmes, "Que sont devenus les enfants de Louis Riel," Ottawa, Le Droit, 10 mars 1943. There was a rumour at the time that Louis' son might have been the victim of a conspiracy.

Ibid.

PAM, MG3, D2, Jean Riel to Honoré J. Jaxon, St-Vital, 8 July 1908. Extract in La Presse, Montréal, 22 février 1912. On Oct. 11, 1911, Jaxon wrote to Joseph Riel from London, England, advising that he would soon be in Montréal and would like to meet Jean's widow. According to the article in La Presse, Jaxon and Mrs. Riel met in Québec City in February 1912.

Joseph, Alexandre and Henriette upheld Louis' struggle and vindicated his actions during their lifetime. Among the succeeding generation, Camille Teillet (husband of Sara Riel daughter of Joseph), Roger Goulet, Samuel Nault and Guillaume Charette, promoted the political and cultural interests through the Union Nationale Métisse and Société historique. Today Métis Federations in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and other associations have renewed demands for the rehabilitation of Louis Riel through legislation such as the long promised amnesty. The Federal Government has also recognized Louis Riel as the founder of the Province of Manitoba.
1. Louis Riel père and Julie Lagimodièrè n.d. [before 1864], PAM.
2. Octavie and Eulalie Riel, ca. 1871, PAM.
3. Henriette Riel, ca. 1878, PAM.
4. Louis Riel, 1878, PAC, C-86500.
5. Marguerite Monet [?], ca. 1885, PAC, C-15468.
6. Jean and Angélique Riel, 1886, ANQ.
7. Louis(on) Lavallée, ca. 1875, ASHSB.
9. Alexandre Riel and 2nd wife, Bibiane Poitras, 1906, ASHSB.
Figure 10
Métis settlement, Montana Territory, 1880's

Scale 0 10 20 30 miles
Selected Bibliography and Suggestions for further reading.

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**Printed Primary**


*Le Manitoba,* juin-août 1885.


*Winnipeg Sun,* June 11, 1885.

**Secondary**


