

GO UP AND POSSESS THE GARDEN OF THE WORLD:  
THE ONTARIO BAPTIST MISSION TO THE NORTH WEST  
TERRITORIES, 1869–1870

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As the *Canadian Baptist Register*<sup>1</sup> reviewed the events that shaped its denomination throughout 1869, several pages were consumed discussing Canada's newly acquired North West Territories, with a special concentration on the fact that there was no Baptist presence within the region.<sup>2</sup> In order to correct this, missionaries were dispatched to gather information and report back to Ontario Baptists so that plans for western expansion could get underway as soon as was feasible. Money was raised and the *Canadian Baptist* newspaper offered numerous reports to its readership to inspire people to uproot and make their claims in the burgeoning land beyond the horizon. No longer was Rupert's Land destined to be a howling wilderness occupied only by natives and fur traders; the west was to be opened up to the influence of Canadians, and, as was argued in the denominational literature, to the influence of the Baptist Church. However, it would not be until 1873 that the first residential Baptist missionary to the area would arrive<sup>3</sup> and while some have argued that this gap in time from conception to realization was due to the limited vision of the Ontario Missionary Societies or a

1. The *Canadian Baptist Register* is also referred to in this article simply as the *Register*. Likewise, the *Canadian Baptist* is sometimes referred to as the *Baptist*.

2. It must be noted that the articles pertaining to the North West Territories occur in the *Canadian Baptist Register* of 1870 as that was the edition that dealt with the events of the previous year.

3. This was Alexander MacDonal, who would earn the moniker "Pioneer" for his undertaking of this assignment.

lack of financial support from the more established churches in Ontario,<sup>4</sup> it is possible that a large portion of the problem lay not in Ontario but in the North West Territories themselves.

In its own words the *Register* stated, “the North West Territories present one of the strangest, if not one of the most complex compounds, in the early history of any country.”<sup>5</sup> Comments like these were inspired by the insurrection that occurred in Red River after the sale of the Territories by the Hudson’s Bay Company to the newly formed Dominion of Canada in 1869. Members of the Métis population set up their own Provisional Government in defiance of both the H.B.C. and Canada.<sup>6</sup> Later on, Fenians from the United States launched an assault on the Territory in an effort to thwart British interests north of the border. Given that the Ontario Home Mission Board tried to “sell” the idea of colonizing the Territories as something of a golden opportunity, such tumult as occurred in the region had more potential to derail the calling to head west than anything else. While it would be unrealistic not to include the aforementioned reasons for the Baptists’ delay in getting to the west, it is worth investigating the *Canadian Baptist*, the *Canadian Baptist Register*, correspondence dating from the time, newspapers, journals, and the work of other historians to see how the violence in the Red River area impacted the Baptist mission to the west.

In order to understand how the Baptists wanted to inspire their people to move, it is essential to understand something of the men who were sent to accomplish this assignment.

4. Grant, *Church*, 50, says, “Despite this vigorous beginning, the Baptists were hampered for many years by their failure to secure a solid base of eastern support.”

5. Davidson and Baldwin, “Report of the Deputation of the North West Territories,” *Canadian Baptist Register*, 1870, 48.

6. For more on the Red River Rebellion, see Berger, *Sense of Power*, 56–59; Bumsted, *Red River Rebellion*; Messamore, *Canada’s Governor General*, 186–89; Stacey, *Canada*, 17. For the role of the churches in the Red River struggle see Coutts, *Road to the Rapids*, 88, 107–9, 170; Grant, *Church*, 31–32; Semple, *Dominion*, 174–77, 292, 414.

Missionaries<sup>7</sup> Rev. Dr. Thomas Davidson and Rev. Thomas Baldwin<sup>8</sup> were both born in Ontario—Davidson in Perth and Baldwin near Hamilton—and both were considered successful pastors at their respective churches, also located in Ontario. Davidson had been friends with R. A. Fyfe<sup>9</sup> since the two first met at Montreal Theological College; he had been the secretary of the Home Mission Convention for fifteen years and seemed a natural selection for the mission at hand. Baldwin was less prominent but equally equipped for the task. He had successfully pastored churches in East Oxford and Ingersoll, and was referred to in the *Register* as “the Missionary” every year after his expedition to the west.<sup>10</sup> In their own words the two men wrote their intention in taking on this calling:

[We want] to go and explore the country known as the Great North West Territories, and report to you upon its physical, political and religious condition. That, with correct knowledge of the country, in its soil and climate, the Baptists might judge of the probable future of that country, and better understand their duties, as a body of Christians, towards that vast Territory, which has now become a part of the Dominion of Canada.<sup>11</sup>

These two men were chosen because they understood the mind of the average Baptist in Ontario and they were to view the west through those Ontario Baptist eyes and bring back reports that would entice the people they were called to represent.

Throughout 1869, Davidson and Baldwin explored the area around Red River and wrote numerous reports back to the

7. “. . . up to the present moment the North-West territory is as much a foreign country as British India,” wrote A. T. Wood, “Red River Deputation,” *Canadian Baptist*, 27 January 1870, 2.

8. For more in-depth information on the two men, see McLaurin, *Pioneering in Western Canada*, 41.

9. Fyfe was arguably the most prominent champion of the cause of western expansion.

10. Hoyes, “Thomas Baldwin—St. Thomas,” *Canadian Baptist Register*, October 1872, 31.

11. Davidson and Baldwin, “Report of the Deputation to the North West Territories,” *Canadian Baptist Register*, 1870, 45.

Ontario Baptists encouraging the denomination to spread its influence westward.<sup>12</sup> The arguments used to inspire Baptist emigration were threefold: the love of Christ<sup>13</sup> and the desire to share his gospel, the love of country and the desire to increase the prestige of the Dominion of Canada for its citizens and its Monarch, and the fertility of the land being described.<sup>14</sup> The Baptists were encouraged to “Go up and possess the land”<sup>15</sup> that lay out before them.<sup>16</sup> Statements like this brought to mind

12. Boulton, *Reminiscences*, 41, says that most inhabitants of Ontario knew very little about the North West Territory. He writes, “[The North West Territories were] isolated from Canada, little was known to the Canadian people of the vast resources of the Hudson’s Bay region.”

13. It appears that the love of Christ was what Davidson’s own church (Aylmer) cited as the primary reason for his acceptance of the assignment. In the Aylmer Church Annual Report of 9 May, 1869 the following is recorded: “Considering the interest of the Gospel of Christ in the Regular Baptist Denomination by the action of the Missionary Board at their last meeting in appointing Dr. Davidson our pastor to explore the Red River Country and represent the interest of the Denomination. Therefore we the church of Malahide and Aylmer willingly assent to his accepting the appointment.” It is interesting to note, in light of the following footnote, that land was not the central issue for the church. Although the *Canadian Baptist Register* gave the quality of the land the lion’s share of the attention, Aylmer church believed it was the duty of their pastor to serve the Gospel of Christ. This does bring up an interesting point regarding how much influence denominational literature impacted/represented the average Baptist. However, it is also very possible that Aylmer had no concept of the land quality prior to Davidson’s report and therefore would have had no reason to mention it.

14. It is worth noting that this is the order present in the *Canadian Baptist*. However, within the pages of the *Canadian Baptist Register* the issue of land is central and makes up the majority of the information dedicated to the subject at hand.

15. “[E]ach interposing event of Providence reiterates the command to our people, ‘Go up and possess the land’” (Davidson, “Lecture on the North-West,” *Canadian Baptist*, 21 October 1869, 2).

16. Davidson and Baldwin both exhibited deep respect for the land. They believed that the ground needed to be tilled and that the Native population was not willing to pay the money or do the work to improve the land. They wrote: “They have no taxes to pay, no public improvements to do . . . and the half-breeds are satisfied . . . with the present state of things” (Davidson and Baldwin, “Report of the Deputation of the North West Territories,” *Canadian Baptist Register*, 1870, 48). However, one could easily make the argument that

Scripture references to the time when God issued a similar command to the Israelites before their entrance into the Promised Land. Such allusions to Scripture revealed a national ideology, within Baptist ranks at least, that proposed that Canada was to be a nation dedicated to the service of God. The missionaries used such biblical incentives to encourage their fellow Baptists to head west and insure that their presence was felt. The “Promised Land” of the west was also frequently reported as being incredibly lush and fertile (a land of milk and honey, so to speak) and was said to be the key to personal and national prosperity. The possession of those natural resources could only bring prestige and wealth to the people and it was stated that the North West was the “Garden of the world and the path to empire.”<sup>17</sup>

In keeping with the idea of Canada as a nation reserved for God, many articles lamented the severe lack of faithful Christianity in the Red River community. This was not due to a shortage of ecclesiastical institutions, because the region was already heavily populated with Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists.<sup>18</sup> Despite the presence of these Christian bodies, Davidson made the following comment

the Native population was happy with the land and that Davidson and Baldwin’s ideas were the ones in need of being corrected.

17. “In my next I shall speak of the advantages of the North-West as a country, which has been described as ‘the path to empire and the garden of the world’” (Davidson, “The Great North-West,” *Canadian Baptist*, 2 September 1869, 2).

18. “[The Anglicans] have, to a certain extent, been successful in gaining a healthful, religious influence over the half-breeds, and in educating them in their parochial schools, which is the only system of education existing in the country . . . The Presbyterians have about 800 members and adherents, under the pastoral care of the Rev. Mr. Black and Rev. Mr. Fletcher” (Davidson and Baldwin, “Report of the Deputation of the North West Territories,” *Canadian Baptist Register*, 1870, 49). Another article discussed the fact that there were two Wesleyan Methodists and that while there was no word about Methodist Societies starting there was a parsonage being built and a chapel being erected. The author then went on to state that the Anglican Church was, “more numerous than those of the Catholic Church or any other” (Davidson, “The North-West Territories,” *Canadian Baptist*, 26 August 1869, 2).

regarding the spiritual state of the land: “[T]he people have abundance of religious means, considering their number; but true vital godliness is at a low ebb.”<sup>19</sup> He encouraged his readers to remedy that situation and referenced them back to one of his previous articles that linked the lack of spirituality to the lack of Baptists in the region. In that article Davidson reported: “At present there are no Baptists in Red River or westward.”<sup>20</sup>

Such an array of Christian denominations already present in the region begs the question: why were the Baptists so far behind the other churches? Historians of the period are almost unanimous in the appraisal that the delayed arrival of Baptists in the Western Frontier was due largely to their church governance in Ontario. It can be said that any Christian denomination’s strength is also usually its weakness and that appears to be the case with the Baptist missions in the nineteenth century. The individual autonomy of each church gave the Baptist ecclesiology an appealing freedom but the lack of an overarching leadership structure made combined initiatives more difficult to realize. Each church struggled just to maintain itself in the largely frontier world of Ontario, which made it hard to fathom raising money and sending people into the far west. Harry Renfree comments that it was precisely the lack of Baptist unity that impacted their mission to the west. He writes, “Why were the Baptists so late on the scene? The lack of unity in central Canada was one critical factor. While two missionary societies had

19. Davidson, “The Great North-West,” *Canadian Baptist*, 2 September 1869, 2.

20. Davidson, “To the North West and Back,” *Canadian Baptist*, 19 August 1869, 2. Despite their condemnations of the Red River faith communities, both men recorded their deep appreciation for the friendly disposition of the other Protestants in so isolated a region. They wrote: “The Venerable Archdeacon McLean, and others of that clergy, showed us much brotherly and Christian kindness, which in that far off land, we felt as coming from God’s own servants” (Davidson, “To the North West and Back,” *Canadian Baptist*, 19 August 1869, 49). Another example: “Episcopal clergymen called on us to-day and were both courteous and communicative, bidding us God speed in our mission” (Davidson and Baldwin, “The Great North West,” *Canadian Baptist*, 12 August 1869, 2). However, the aforementioned kindness did not eliminate the drive in Davidson and Baldwin to bring the Baptist perspective to the area.

developed, their focus was on missions within their own region.”<sup>21</sup> Baptist historian C. C. McLaurin would have agreed with this statement as well. In his extensive volume dedicated solely to Baptist work in Western Canada he wrote:

The Ontario Home Missions Convention, according to its charter, was confined in its missionary work to the Province of Ontario. Authorities were compelled to organize the Foreign Missionary Society of Ontario in order to send Rev. A. V. Timpay and J. McLaurin to India, but it did not seem possible to organize another Society to send a Missionary to the North West. I suppose it looked too insignificant a mission field to require a Society, and no organization of Baptists in Canada could, according to its Charter, assume any responsibility for work in the great, lone land.<sup>22</sup>

The churches with strong, centralized government like the Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Catholics were able to see the need to spread to the West and mobilize rapidly so that by the late nineteenth century, when the Baptists finally arrived, some of the other denominations had been there for over thirty years.<sup>23</sup>

21. Renfree, *Heritage and Horizon*, 171–72.

22. McLaurin, *Pioneering in Western Canada*, 31–32.

23. Lord Selkirk began filling Red River with Scottish settlers from 1811 to 1815 in an attempt to build a predominantly Scottish settlement. While there were, no doubt, some clergy in attendance even then, for the purpose of this paper this note will concentrate more on when the churches were considered officially founded. For more on the nuanced story of the founding of Red River see Campey, *The Silver Chief*, ch. 7. The Anglican Church: “Founded in 1829, St. Andrew’s [Anglican] was one of the prominent and most populous communities in nineteenth-century Red River,” says Coutts, *Road to the Rapids*, xii. 1845 saw the arrival of A. A. Tache, and in 1851 he was appointed coadjutor bishop of the area. Tache enjoyed profound popularity with the Métis (including Louis Riel, upon whom he had quite an impact). Presbyterian John Black had arrived in 1851 (he also hosted Davidson and Baldwin in his church, allowing them to preach. This is referenced in a subsequent section of the paper). While the Methodists had been at work to the north and west of the Red River settlement they did not officially appoint a minister to the region until 1868, a Toronto man by the name of George Young. For a concise summary of this see Grant, *Church*, 30–33. These statistics strengthen Renfree’s statement: “Other denominations were already well established [in Red River]” (Renfree, *Heritage and Horizon*, 168.

Baldwin and Davidson were aware that this unspiritual atmosphere or “churchianity”<sup>24</sup> as they called it, of the frontier could be seen as a deterrent, and not an incentive, to many Baptists. Without Baptist institutions supporting Baptist theology in the area, the likelihood that members of the denomination would move there was minimal. The *Canadian Baptist* printed this comment:

Baptists have had no encouragement to go and make their homes in the land. They know if they did, they would leave the means of grace which they so highly prize for themselves and leave their children behind them; and parents should be slow to remove with their children into a country where there are none of the means of grace such as their own views of the truth could approve.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore the men concluded that a two-fold approach was needed. First, the denomination needed to send a missionary who would be willing to stay and build the necessary structures to support Baptist culture in the region.<sup>26</sup> They wrote:

We would not recommend the Convention to send a missionary for the sake of the present inhabitants, but for the purpose of having a man of energy and pastoral experience on the ground, to secure building sites in the rising towns, which must immediately spring up with the rapid increase of population; and with the higher purpose still of gathering people for the future cause and for the glory of God.<sup>27</sup>

Next, those interested in moving should attempt to move out in communities to ease the transition and bring a more stable

24. “There is more churchianity than christianity [sic]” wrote Davidson, “The Great North-West,” *Canadian Baptist*, 2 September 1869, 2.

25. Davidson and Baldwin, “Report of the Deputation of the North West Territories,” *Canadian Baptist Register*, 1870, 49.

26. Davidson and Baldwin frequently referred to the loneliness of the prairies and even reported that the arrival of the *Canadian Baptist* did much to ease their homesickness. They wrote: “[A *Canadian Baptist*] dated June 17<sup>th</sup>, came last night, and was eagerly read” (Davidson, “Our Journey to Red River,” *Canadian Baptist*, 22 July 1869, 2).

27. Davidson and Baldwin, “Report of the Deputation of the North West Territories,” *Canadian Baptist Register*, 1870, 50.

Baptist presence.<sup>28</sup> Davidson made this comment: “I should say the best plan would be for Canadians to move in colonies . . . They would then have congenial society and soon a church and chapel of their own, and a Pastor.”<sup>29</sup> If these two events could take place, it was argued, then the Ontario Baptists could take their rightful place alongside the other denominations in the struggle to save souls in the new frontier.<sup>30</sup>

However, it was not simply the salvation of souls that was used to draw Baptists to the new land. As has already been stated, the purchase of the North West was also seen as a tremendous blessing for the young nation of Canada. With such incalculable resources available for the general public, the promise of wealth and prestige was a powerful persuader. Coupled with that was the pride at being able to expand the Dominion of Canada and the might of the British crown. The following report from Davidson in the early days of their journey is an example of the profound and moving impact both nationalism and imperialism had on the people of the time:

It was a pleasant relief to us when we came two miles north of Pembina, to the International Boundary line . . . On the South side are the letters “U.S.” and on the North side “H.B. Co.” Bro. Baldwin

28. He did assure his readers that there were other Canadians in Red River who were examining the place for themselves. He wrote: “We have met a goodly number of Canadians since coming here, some of them settlers, and others tourists, who have come to see the country and settle if they like” (Davidson, “Our Journey to Red River,” *Canadian Baptist*, 22 July 1869, 2).

29. Davidson, “To the North West and Back,” *Canadian Baptist*, 19 August 1869, 2.

30. A point of interest that cannot be pursued due to the focus of this paper is the burgeoning movement for the trans-Canada railway that was going on at that time. Although it was mentioned only a few times in the *Canadian Baptist*, Davidson recognized that the railway was the only way Canada could hope to truly colonize the west. He wrote: “a good railroad through British territory [is] the only proper and efficient means of colonizing the Red River country, and the immense valley of the Saskatchewan [sic] beyond, with a people British in feeling and ideas, and who will cherish their connection with Canada, and foster commercial relations with our people” (Davidson, “To the North West and Back,” *Canadian Baptist*, 19 August 1869, 2).

took his pencil and wrote in bold hand the word “Canada,” and I pencilled [sic] my name. We then mounted our waggon [sic], gave three resounding cheers for Her Majesty, and sang, with tears starting to our eyes, “*God Save the Queen*.”<sup>31</sup>

Such a tale recorded the pride at being both Canadian and British and that pride was drawn upon frequently in the pages of the *Canadian Baptist*.

Growing within that national pride was the pressure to colonize the vast expanses of the west before the Americans did. Davidson reported back to Ontario that the United States was well on its way to populating the areas south of the border. He commented: “[Minnesota] is fast filling up, and the American Government is giving land to emigrant settlers on most favourable terms.”<sup>32</sup> Implicit in the comment was the threat that if no Canadians filled up the land north of the border, the Americans would most likely turn in that direction for the benefit of their own nation. He wrote, “In what relations will we stand to Great Britain in the matter, if . . . we tamely suffer the territory thus acquired to be betrayed, unintentionally or otherwise, into the hands of a foreign power?”<sup>33</sup> However, if the Canadians could take the land, the Dominion would find new respect and strength in its position. The *Canadian Baptist* printed this excerpt from one of Davidson’s lectures: “[If Canadians cultivate the land] we shall soon become a power not antagonistic to, but rival in the

31. Davidson, “Our Journey to Red River,” *Canadian Baptist*, 22 July 1869, 2. The popularity of such a sentiment is evidenced in the following remarks, reprinted in response to Davidson’s report from the *St. John New Brunswick News*: “Rather a fine spectacle that of these hat-waving, cheering and anthem singing Baptist divines on the verge of our far western wilderness . . . We should be glad to see ten thousand such men, good to sing, strong to cheer, going into the fertile belt, year by year, for a long time to come” (“Wanted—One Hundred Thousand Baptists in the North-West within the Next Ten Years,” *Canadian Baptist*, 14 October 1869, 2).

32. Davidson, “Our Journey to Red River,” *Canadian Baptist*, 22 July 1869, 2.

33. Davidson, “The Red River Territory,” *Canadian Baptist*, 20 January 1870, 3.

best sense of the word, to our cousins across the line.”<sup>34</sup> It was not only competition with America that occupied the columns of the *Canadian Baptist*, but also the need to bring greater civilization to the barbarous plains.<sup>35</sup>

When the Hudson’s Bay Company owned the land there was very little effort made to bring outsiders in, since that would have jeopardized the company’s hold over the fur trading industry.<sup>36</sup> Davidson commented: “the North West territories are to be governed by Canada and not as heretofore by a fur trading monopoly whose interest it was to discourage immigration into the country and keep it as a howling wilderness.”<sup>37</sup> Although there were British and Canadian institutions (including churches)

34. Davidson, “Lecture on the North-West,” *Canadian Baptist*, 21 October 1869, 2.

35. “The Protestant missionary was convinced that the Indian, Métis, and Halfbreed were infected by the contagion of barbarism, and that they were lost to civilization” (Pannekoek, *Snug Little Flock*, 80).

36. Articles written in the *Canadian Baptist Register* also mentioned that a similar sentiment existed among the Métis and other Native inhabitants of the land. Whether or not this was an accurate portrayal does not matter, but it was used to further alienate Ontarians from the people of the North West. An example of such sentiments is printed here: “[The inhabitants of the area] do not want the sharp, enterprising competition, which emigration from Ontario must bring; so no loyal feelings are expressed towards our government” (Davidson and Baldwin, “Report of the Deputation of the North West Territories,” *Canadian Baptist Register*, 1870, 48). Major Charles Boulton also supported this statement. He wrote: “The Company had one principle, which all the officers rigidly acted upon, namely, to hide from the world any knowledge of the extensive and valuable resources over which they held sway, dreading the influx of an enterprising population, which might wrest from them their valuable fur trade and demoralize the hunting qualities of the Indians” (Boulton, *Reminiscences*, 45). Charlebois, *Life of Louis Riel*, 14–16, also comments on the desire of the Hudson’s Bay Company (newly amalgamated with The North-West Company in 1821) to insure their control over the land. He writes: “The fur-traders, united in the Hudson’s Bay Company, now confronted a growing and increasingly stronger body of settlers . . . The settlers kept up a continual battle against the Company’s attempts to enforce its monopoly.”

37. Davidson, “To the North West and Back,” *Canadian Baptist*, 19 August 1869, 2.

already established in places like Red River, it was the position of Thomas Davidson that more young Baptist men could bring even greater culture to the uncivilized west. The *Canadian Baptist* printed the following statement:

[Davidson hoped that the area] would become the future home of our ambitious young men; receive into its broad bosom the surplus millions of the old countries; rearing the spires and domes of civilization; making the Saskatchewan and the Assineboine [sic] echo the music of the Thames and the Mersey; protected by that flag on which the sun never sets.<sup>38</sup>

Statements like that reinforced the idea that bringing Christianity was largely interchangeable with bringing British culture.

Although he was sent by the Baptists as a missionary, Davidson knew the intrinsic value of the land in which he had traveled. He commented numerous times, both in letters and lectures, about the untapped potential of the North West. His reports never ceased making pleas that the Baptist readers look to the west as the place from which they, and the nation of Canada, could draw resources. In one of his lectures Davidson made the following speech:

[T]he time has already come when those millions upon millions of untilled acres of magnificent prairies can no longer be suffered to lie untilled, when those far-stretching rivers and quiet lakes must be navigated not alone by the frail Indian canoe, but they must be ploughed by our noble steamers bearing the produce of well tilled lands, of the almost boundless mineral resources of the far West and proudly floating the Old Flag. The pathway to empire lies Westward and is open to our New Dominion.<sup>39</sup>

Although such sentiments were no doubt compelling, Davidson and Baldwin used most of their space reporting what they saw, not what they thought.

38. Davidson, "Lecture on the North-West," *Canadian Baptist*, 7 October 1869, 3.

39. Davidson, "Lecture on the North-West," *Canadian Baptist*, 21 October 1869, 2.

The land itself was the major selling point, and this is evidenced by the large number of articles simply extolling its value and fertility, and the amount of space the land received in the pages of the *Register*. The *Canadian Baptist* printed this comment: "All things considered, this country, from Fort Garry southward along the Red River for 60 miles to the boundary line . . . is a most desirable place for settlement."<sup>40</sup> Upon their return from the west, Davidson and Baldwin toured Ontario pleading their case and drawing large crowds of curious people. Although we no longer possess the content of their lectures, the responses printed in the *Canadian Baptist* and the *Register* seem to indicate that the presentations were entertaining, enlightening, and well-attended.<sup>41</sup> They also seem to have been designed to educate people, in the hopes that they would decide to settle out west. Shortly after their return, the *Canadian Baptist* printed this report about one of Davidson's lectures: "The Baptist Chapel and Vestry, seats and standing room, were densely crowded . . . [this was due to] the interest now felt on the subject by most thoughtful and patriotic persons."<sup>42</sup> It is worth noting that the paper mentions that the event was "densely crowded," that the subject was gathering interest, and commends those who attended as both "thoughtful" and "patriotic."

Davidson appears to have done the lion's share of the lectures; he also appears to have been very engaging. The

40. Davidson, "Great North West Territories," *Canadian Baptist*, 14 October 1869, 2.

41. It is on this point that I part company with others who have written on the subject at hand. Although never explicitly stated, it has been largely the consensus of other historians that the Baptist mission to the west never had much momentum behind it. However, after the return of Davidson and Baldwin, it appears, based on articles in the *Canadian Baptist*, that their lectures and writing were immensely popular. While it cannot be stated definitively whether or not Baptists would have moved west earlier had the Riel incident not occurred, it is worth noting that prior to the event the idea of western expansion was gaining in popularity.

42. Davidson, "Lecture on the North-West" *Canadian Baptist*, 7 October 1869, 3.

*Canadian Baptist* reported that he frequently made use of props to further enamor his audience with the western lands:

On the platform beside the speaker, during the lecture, was a large trunk, and from time to time, by way of illustration, came specimens of wheat, prairie grass, rank and luxuriant, prairie flowers, Indian curiosities (not scalps, the Reds prized them too highly to part with them) . . . and a few pounds of pemmican, or Buffalo meat, prepared without salt to keep in any climate.<sup>43</sup>

Such demonstrations were designed to capture the imagination of the people as well as eliminate certain fears. The efforts of these two men were being rewarded and the notion that Baptists could move out west was gaining momentum. Not only was the venture becoming popular but the conclusions reached by Davidson and Baldwin included the need for expediency in seeing the move west realized. They finished their official report by writing the following:

In conclusion, permit us to express it as our opinion, in view of all the circumstances, that the conditional appointment of a missionary, providing a colony of Baptist families would unite, move and settle together, in the Great North-West; would be a means of spreading Baptist principles in that far off country, *faster than by any other way within our reach*.<sup>44</sup>

However, all that was to change shortly after the men's return, for while they were still touring and defending their case, the land they were extolling exploded into chaos and violence.<sup>45</sup>

43. Davidson, "Lecture on the North-West," *Canadian Baptist*, 7 October 1869, 3.

44. Davidson and Baldwin, "Report of the Deputation of the North West Territories," *Canadian Baptist Register*, 1870, 51–52 (italics added for emphasis).

45. While we know little of Baldwin's activities outside of lecturing at this time, we do know that Davidson's absence from his church during the latter half of 1869 was used by some to remove him from his office. Upon his return Davidson had been convinced that his church would do better without him and that he should resign. The official feelings of the church reflected this to be not true but the following quote from the Aylmer Baptist Church Minutes, 12 December, 1869, serves the purpose of the topic at hand by showing that

Davidson and Baldwin returned to Ontario in late 1869; had they stayed they would have had far more to write home about. Political insurrection was afoot in Red River and the events that transpired after their return to Ontario completely overshadowed all the positive press they had attempted to bring to the North West. The rebellion was crucial, because once Fort Garry was taken and the Canadian surveyors were prevented from entering the territory,<sup>46</sup> all mention about Baptists moving west halted,<sup>47</sup> as did the flow of reliable information. From that point on the *Canadian Baptist's* stance on the North West was reduced to editorializing about the incident, arguments about misappropriation of the funds used to pay Davidson and Baldwin,<sup>48</sup> and

Davidson was in personal conflict during his time on the road: “. . . we as a church do not believe the work and usefulness of Rev. Dr. Davidson is done in this Church and community as stated in his resignation . . . the statement made by parties at a distance and not connected with this Church to the affect that this Church would be glad for the Rev. Dr. Davidson to leave us is utterly false.”

46. “By the time the Governor [MacDougall] arrived in Pembina [Riel] had a small force under his command, at River Sale, where he erected a barricade to guard the entrance into the country . . . Riel, finding that the Governor had ignored his warning . . . sent a party to drive him across the line by force, if necessary” (Boulton, *Reminiscences*, 63).

47. Historian Hartwell Bowsfield also refers to the idea of destiny present in the Ontario mindset as it pertained to emigration to what would become Manitoba. He also cites the Riel uprising as the incident that threatened the move more than anything else. Bowsfield writes: “It was expected that the new western provinces which would eventually emerge should resemble the one from which settlers were most likely to come. But the Riel disturbance in 1869–1870 threatened to defeat Ontario’s declared destiny” (Bowsfield, *Riel*, 62).

48. Throughout 1870 there were several articles printed under the title “Red River Deputation,” that chronicled the debate between A. T. Wood and certain members of the Baptist Convention that he charged with misappropriation of funds. The money for the missionaries to the area was still short about \$75 by January of 1870. Money was supposed to be raised to pay them by those who had supported the enterprise to the North West, but the goal had not been met. The argument was that other missionaries needed to know that they could trust the Convention to supply them with the financial means they needed. He also argued that people would stop paying into this fund if the money was

printing second-hand reports about the insurgence that often proved to be false.

The situation in Red River officially began in December of 1869 when Louis Riel and some Métis followers took possession of Fort Garry after the Hudson's Bay Company relinquished control of the Red River Settlement to the Canadian government.<sup>49</sup> Concerned that the existing land allotments would not be honored, the Métis were resistant to the deal because the land they lived on had been sold without their consent. The Baptist explorer, Davidson, wrote the following in the *Canadian Baptist* to help the readers understand the Métis's perspective. He wrote: "[The Métis] are considerably discontented just now, and the cause of this is that they say the Hudson's Bay Company have sold them and their country to the Canadian Government."<sup>50</sup>

Little had been done by Canada to assuage the Métis's fear and Davidson proved fairly prophetic when he proclaimed that trouble would come if the government did not make dealing with the native inhabitants its first concern. He wrote:

In my humble opinion the *first imperative* duty of the Government is to make a treaty . . . with the present owners of the soil . . . The Government are now making a serious mistake, and I tremble for the probable results. Surveyors are now sent out to survey the land before it is bought from the Indians, thus rousing their ire.<sup>51</sup>

The Métis, though demonized as violent and resistant to Canada, frequently stated that their only concern regarding the Canadian agenda in the northwest was that the officials sent to represent the new nation did not seem to acknowledge the

misappropriated. This debate carried on well into the spring of 1870. Also, in this article Davidson and Baldwin are referred to as missionaries.

49. "The terms of this agreement were a money payment of three hundred thousand pounds, and one-twentieth of the lands as they were surveyed, to be selected by the Company within fifty years, also a reservation around each of their principal posts throughout the country" (Boulton, *Reminiscences*, 51).

50. Davidson, "The Great North-West," *Canadian Baptist*, 2 September 1869, 2.

51. Davidson, "The Great North West: Its Present Drawbacks and Disadvantages," *Canadian Baptist*, 16 September 1869, 2.

existing allotments. The *Canadian Baptist* recorded similar sentiments when reports became available from the settlement. One article recorded the following: “The Red River rebellion has at length pegged out. It was a humbug all the way through. These half-breeds never sought Independence, much less Annexation. They were dissatisfied from fear that they might lose the title lands on which they squatted.”<sup>52</sup>

In one of his letters, Louis Riel wrote about the lack of regard the inhabitants were shown by the Canadians. He wrote: “under the orders of General Dennis, government surveyors arrived and began drawing lines in every direction, totally disregarding the fact that they were on private property.”<sup>53</sup> Even earlier on in 1868 Riel made the following comment that shows the level of distrust the Métis had for the Canadian government. He stated: “As soon as winter [of 1868] set in, the Canadian Government, under the pretext of supplying relief to the Red River families threatened by famine, had sent some workers to open the Dawson Road at Points-de-Chenes. That was the first infraction. The country was not Canadian, and this was an unprecedented act for a government to do.”<sup>54</sup>

Sprague, in his article “The Manitoba Land Question, 1870–1882,” commented on what he perceived to be the duplicity of the Manitoba Land Act. He believed that the Act was simply a ploy to keep the peace while the Canadian government recreated the entire area in Ontario’s likeness. He writes: “The leading members of the government believed that Canada could—and should—change the face of the province they recognized in 1870, to recreate Manitoba in the image of Ontario.”<sup>55</sup> The idea

52. “The North-West,” *Canadian Baptist*, 17 February 1870, 2. It is also worth noticing that the author of this quote mentions that the original inhabitants were “squattening” on the land and this person was also wrong when he/she stated that the entire ordeal was over in February; when the Canadian military marched into Red River in August, that is when the Provisional government was replaced by the Canadian government.

53. Fremont, quoting Riel, in *Secretaries of Riel*, 14.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Sprague, “Manitoba Land Question,” 63.

of using laws familiar to the people of Ontario to remove the native inhabitants of Red River was something that the *Canadian Baptist* reported to its readers as well in the months before the rebellion. The native distaste for the Canadian system of taxation would be used to drive them from the lands Ontarians wanted to possess. One such article stated: "The half-breeds will not submit to taxation, and the result will be that they will sell out their claims to Canadians and move back on unsurveyed lands, and hence, in a few years, settlers from Canada and elsewhere will own the lands they now control."<sup>56</sup> Sentiments such as this further showed a desire to colonize the west for the purposes of the citizens of Ontario but the desire to bring their culture to the west was hampered by Riel's plans, and his violent refusal to accept Canadian dominance made him a serious obstacle to the Baptist mission.

In response to the taking of Fort Garry, the Canadians tried to gain support for their cause from other Red River inhabitants. The *Canadian Baptist* tried to show its readers that Riel's group held very little sway over the greater population of Red River. It reported: "The Provisional Government is said to be very unpopular even among its former supporters. It only commands the support of a section of the half-breed population, and they are impatient of anything like discipline or military restraint."<sup>57</sup> The Anglophone settlers in the region seemed a natural selection for the Canadians to recruit, but the English and French had peacefully coexisted for years in Red River and this cohabitation proved to be an insurmountable obstacle to Colonel Dennis's plan.<sup>58</sup> His inability to raise a formidable army gave strength to Riel's Provisional Government. Louis Schmidt wrote in his journal: "Colonel Dennis, for his part, was probing to find out if it would be possible to levy an army among the English and

56. Davidson, "The Great North-West," *Canadian Baptist*, 2 September 1869, 2.

57. "Red River," *Canadian Baptist*, 10 June 1870, 3.

58. Dennis was MacDougall's right hand man and was given charge over the area by MacDougall to remove Riel from Red River.

Scottish settlers to fight the French Métis. The results were disconcerting.”<sup>59</sup>

With the Métis firmly in control of Red River and the military unable to forcefully dislodge them, getting accurate details about the insurrection back to Ontario became nearly impossible. The *Canadian Baptist* struggled to find reliable information for its readers and came up woefully short in this regard. The distance between Ontario and Red River became apparent as all information about the battle came to the *Canadian Baptist* via other sources. Articles that spoke of Riel’s failures one month were retracted the next. One such example took place in early 1870; in the issue of 3 February it was reported that Riel was arrested and his staunch supporters had all but deserted him. This was no doubt received as good news in Ontario. However, the following week the *Canadian Baptist* was forced to report that mail and newspapers had just come in from Red River, “neither of which mention the arrest of Riel.”<sup>60</sup> In addition to that, the *Canadian Baptist* reported that Riel’s popularity had not vanished but was actually growing. The *Canadian Baptist* wrote: “The opposition party of the French has all gone over to Riel, and now want to invest him with supreme power . . . Riel proposes then to employ all his powers and resources to carry out the programme of his adherents; which is anti-Canadian to the last.”<sup>61</sup> Even the last statement about Riel’s anti-Canadian agenda proved to be false as well. He simply wanted to insure that the rights of the people

59. Fremont, *Secretaries of Riel*, 16. Charlebois also notes how ethnic disparity between the Scottish settlers and the Métis was prominent and traced its roots back to the early days of the Red River Settlement. He writes: “The North-West employees did their best to incite the Métis and Indians against the new Scottish settlers, making use of differences of race, religion and national origin, to create an animosity which was to last for many years” (*Life of Louis Riel*, 13). What is most amazing about this incident is that, by the time of Riel’s rebellion, the different groups had actually learned to live so peacefully with each other, even to the point that they refused to fight one another!

60. “Red River Settlement,” *Canadian Baptist*, 10 February 1870, 2.

61. “Red River Settlement,” *Canadian Baptist*, 10 February 1870, 2.

of Red River would be respected under the governance of Canada.

However, it must be considered that something more sinister than simply inaccurate fact-gathering was going on here. The press was instrumental in maintaining Riel's status as a crook and enemy of Canada and vilifying him became essential to maintaining support in Ontario. The loyalism of Ontario was highlighted as the Métis were held up as traitors to Canada.<sup>62</sup> Sprague records the delineation between loyalists and insurgents in the wake of the situation during a census of the area. He writes: "while enumerating Manitobans for census purposes in the autumn of 1870, the population was sorted into two groups, one the 'Insurgents' and the other the 'Loyalists.' Loyalists received cash indemnities and political patronage. There was nothing for the general Insurgent population."<sup>63</sup> Historian J. M. Bumsted also charges the press of the time with deliberately reporting false stories designed to incite Protestant anger in Ontario. He states: "the main effect of the propaganda campaign was to inflame Protestant Ontario against Louis Riel and the Métis."<sup>64</sup> The *Canadian Illustrated News* seemed to support this accusation when they wrote the following editorial: "acrimonious and insulting attacks upon the people of Red River should not be indulged by the press."<sup>65</sup>

Throughout the pages of the *Canadian Baptist*, Riel was constantly portrayed as a criminal and a man of ill repute. While loyalism was not as prominent a theme, the *Baptist* revealed its Christian roots by accusing Riel and his followers of questionable morality. Several blatantly inflammatory articles were printed that were designed to call into question the character of the leaders of the Métis uprising. One of Riel's officers was a man by the name of O'Donohue and the *Canadian Baptist* reported

62. This was even though they were not actually citizens of Canada and, as such, could not be considered traitors to a country to which they had yet to belong.

63. Sprague, "Manitoba Land Question," 64.

64. Bumsted (ed.), *Reporting the Resistance*, 171.

65. Sean Sullivan, *Canadian Illustrated News*, 25 June 1870, 534.

that he was even more sinister than his famous leader: “O’Donohue is still more generally execrated than Riel, as he is deemed, if possible, more shameless. His last exploit was to steal money from a letter addressed to Mrs. Mair, who is still in the settlement. He also wears Mrs. Schultz’s gold watch.”<sup>66</sup>

Ironically, the one incident which most supported the *Canadian Baptist*’s claims of Riel’s moral repugnancy warranted little attention. The execution of Orangeman<sup>67</sup> Thomas Scott under Riel’s leadership was viewed by many as Riel’s fatal political blunder that ultimately led to his exile from Canada and the collapse of his Provisional Government.<sup>68</sup> Fremont makes the following quote: “starting from that day . . . Riel’s power, even among his own people, started to diminish until at last he remained almost alone.”<sup>69</sup> However, the only time the *Canadian Baptist* mentioned this watershed moment was to question whether or not the event had even occurred. The *Baptist* wrote the following: “Not more than half the settlers profess to believe that

66. “Red River,” *Canadian Baptist*, 26 May 1870, 3. O’Donoghue (note the different spelling) would actually help command a Fenian force into Manitoba after a falling out with Riel because he thought Riel was too compromising to the British. Riel never supported the Fenian invasion and saw them as unconcerned with the affairs of the Métis. The two parted company and it is possible that Riel actually led a cavalry charge against O’Donoghue in 1871 when the Fenians actually did invade. There will be more on the Fenian invasion in a subsequent section of this paper.

67. The Orangemen and Orange Lodge were named after William of Orange, the Protestant king who replaced James II in 1691 and insured that the British throne would remain Protestant. The Orangemen were virulent opponents of anything Catholic (which most Métis were) and staunch loyalists.

68. Evidence of just how serious a blunder this execution was considered is the following quote from Riel’s personal secretary, Louis Schmidt, during this time: “I will not try to justify that execution. For years it was used by the people of Ontario to foster their prejudice and hatred, not only against the Métis but against everything French and Catholic . . . Scott’s execution, under the circumstances, remained none the less a very grave political error . . . It was the signal for an unfortunate upheaval that was to degenerate into a conflict of race and religion with long and painful repercussions” (Fremont, *Secretaries of Riel*, 39–40).

69. Fremont, quoting Alexander Begg, *Secretaries of Riel*, 40.

Scott was killed, and it is deemed treason to mention the subject.”<sup>70</sup> Of all the false reports issued in the *Canadian Baptist*, the only one they questioned was the one that turned out to be true. It would not be until the end of the situation, when evidence was more readily available, that Scott would be elevated to the status of martyr for the Canadian cause.<sup>71</sup> Riel was held up as a tyrant with Scott playing the part of noble loyalist. One article, written in England and reprinted in the *Canadian Baptist*, commented: “an adventurer has risen to power, called himself President, plundered private property, and murdered one, who, loyal to the last, denied a spurious rule.”<sup>72</sup>

A large portion of the press of the time seemed concerned only with creating an image of Riel that was designed to breed rage and distrust within the minds of Ontario readers. This, obviously, had an impact on the minds of Baptists in Ontario and their proposed mission west. Rather than reporting the Canadian government’s attempts to incite civil war within the Red River settlement in order to take the land from the natives by force, the press deliberately set Riel up as an enemy of the new nation of Canada. The instability Riel’s insurrection brought to the region played to Ontarians’ desire to see Canada grow stronger and more prosperous. In an article in May of 1870 the *Canadian*

70. “Red River,” *Canadian Baptist*, 26 May 1870, 2.

71. The relationship between Scott and Riel took on almost mythical qualities in certain arenas of Canadian life. In the anonymous book *The Story of Louis Riel: The Rebel Chief* (1885), is an account that Scott and Riel met much earlier than the insurrection. In the tale, Riel became enamoured of a young farm girl he met while hunting in the woods. When she did not return his affections, Riel assumed that she had another love interest. Riel stayed with the girl and her father and the next morning he caught her looking out the window at a “tall, well-formed, young white man.” Figuring this to be the man who had the young maiden’s heart, Riel found out that it was none other than Thomas Scott. The author of the book then records: “This was the same Scott . . . the tidings of whose fate, at the hands of the rebel and murderer, Louis Riel, in later years, sent the blood boiling through the veins of Western Canada.” Thus the seeds of enmity were planted between the two men long before their fateful (and more historical) encounter during the Red River Rebellion. For more, see *The Story of Louis Riel*, 49–62.

72. “Red River Difficulty,” *Canadian Baptist*, 3 September 1870, 2.

*Baptist* reminded people that Riel's antics practically invited foreign invaders like the Irish-American Fenians into the open expanse of the west.<sup>73</sup>

According to Sprague, national pride also played a vital role in the mentality of Protestant Ontario towards Riel. He writes: "Ontario members of Parliament—especially those with Orange Lodge Associations—complained that Canada had been humiliated. National honour demanded punishment rather than favours for these western rebels."<sup>74</sup> However, the *Canadian Baptist* was not so forthright in its assessment of Red River, and an author known simply as "Querist" lobbied the newspaper, hoping that cooler and less violent heads would prevail. He wrote:

[That] the resources of honorable and statesmanlike diplomacy should be brought to bear and exhausted, before any sterner alternative is proposed, must be admitted by any patriotic and christian [sic] mind . . . It cannot surely be contended that [The Hudson's Bay Company] were in any way bound to transfer the *allegiance* of the half-breeds, or that the *inhabitants* were in any sense included in the terms of the sale. But if we bought simply certain Territorial rights, or claims with encumbrances, can we honorably recede from our engagements because those encumbrances prove a little more troublesome, possibly through our own fault, than we supposed?<sup>75</sup>

Although this quote is conciliatory in nature it is worth noting that in the same article Querist also reminded the readers that the government was established by God to maintain order on earth, and, if need be, must use the sword. Querist's article ended with the following words:

73. "Our sons would have to leave their farms, workshops and stores, not only for Indian warfare in western wilds, but also to face Fenians and other reckless adventurers in our own country" ("Script of the Canadian Literary Institute," *Canadian Baptist*, 27 January 1870, 3). This prophecy regarding the Fenians entrance into this land would prove accurate. See below.

74. Sprague, "Manitoba Land Question," 63.

75. Querist, "The Red River Territory," *Canadian Baptist*, 20 January 1870, 3.

If human governments are of Divine appointment, is it not their first duty to be a “terror to evil-doers and a praise to them that do well.” And ought not the religious sentiment, and religious press of the country to encourage, and impel them, to the adoption of such gentle, just, yet firm and unequivocal measures, as are after all the only safeguards of liberty, peace and prosperity? A vacillating and timid policy never yet made a peaceable and prosperous nation.<sup>76</sup>

This statement began a debate within the pages of the *Canadian Baptist* which lasted two more months.

Those who opposed Querist restated that involvement in a violent confrontation could open the expansive and not well-armed Dominion to other hostile forces. However, while that was a legitimate concern, the *Canadian Baptist* was a Christian magazine and the final word was a commendation to put the matter into the hands of God, and to remember that the God the Baptists served was never in favor of war:

Let not the Patriotism of “Querist” blind his mind to the fact that the Dominion of Canada, aside from the Mother Country, is a small nation. Boast as we may of our resources, they are to be enjoyed in peace . . . [if it comes to war] turbulent spirits, the offspring of old world revolutions, and of the late American war, would swarm upon our borders. Our sons would have to leave their farms, workshops and stores, not only for Indian warfare in western wilds, but also to face Fenians and other reckless adventurers in our own country. We advise ‘Querist’ to cool down, and let statesmanship, under the guidance of an All Wise Over-Ruling Providence, solve the problem of the future relationship which we shall sustain to the North-West. “My voice is not for war.”<sup>77</sup>

It is worth noting, in light of Bumsted’s condemnation of the press’s lack of objectivity, that Querist commends the press to exert influence on its readers and its government to insure that the situation finds a proper, Christian conclusion.

76. Querist, “The Red River Territory,” *Canadian Baptist*, 20 January 1870, 3.

77. “Script of the Canadian Literary Institute,” *Canadian Baptist*, 27 January 1870, 3.

It would be unfair to say that the *Canadian Baptist* spent all of its power to demonize Riel; the truth is that after the end of the Red River situation and Riel's exile to the United States,<sup>78</sup> the *Baptist* also reported discontent with regards to the manner in which the press had acted during the disturbance. The following statement appeared:

A long editorial headed "Right or Wrong" goes on to prove that the Red River people have always been loyal, and have been misunderstood—that the English and Canadian press begin to acknowledge this, and that the surrendering of the Government by the Hudson Bay Company on the arrival of Mr. McDougall made it necessary that a Provisional Government should be formed.<sup>79</sup>

The Protestant press exerted a tremendous amount of influence over its people at this time and the opinions expressed within the pages of the *Canadian Baptist* had an unmatched ability to influence the opinions of its readers.<sup>80</sup> Comments like that would have been absolutely vital to begin the process of rebuilding peace and goodwill between the Canadians and the Métis as well as getting the Baptist mission to the west back on track.

The *Canadian Baptist's* push to see more Baptists out west completely relaxed during the Red River situation. In 1869, every article relating to the west recorded the concern that there was no Baptist presence west of Ontario and sought to remedy that problem. It was apparent that many people still held on to

78. "Red River Matters," *Canadian Baptist*, 18 August 1870, mentions Riel briefly and wonders whether or not he is worth sending people after him. Some argue that the US and Canada should both find him.

79. "Red River Matters," *Canadian Baptist*, 30 June 1870, 2.

80. Peter Hennessy notes that papers were given over to editorializing and how accurately they portrayed the mindset of their readers must be scrutinized. For more on this see Hennessy, "The Press and Broadcasting," 20. Even though journalists cannot be expected to treat issues of the day with as even a hand as historians, the usefulness to historians of newspapers to help define the positions of certain people within a given community cannot be underestimated. For more on this topic see Heath, "Forming Sound Public Opinion," footnotes 10 and 11; Franzosi, "The Press as a Source," 5–16.

fears of the uncivilized expanse beyond Ontario's borders and the Riel incident did nothing to quell those fears. Baldwin and Davidson tried to remedy that when they wrote: "In the absence of any regular form of government, or the administration of law, it is marvellous [sic] that such good order is maintained in and beyond the Red River Settlement, that crime is so little known, and quiet is so generally maintained."<sup>81</sup> They also tried to instill in their readers confidence in the institutions present in the west by writing, "The Hudson Bay Company claim to govern within 50 miles of Fort Garry; they have a council, judge, and gaol."<sup>82</sup> However, the Red River situation rendered all such assertions of safety and peace moot.

To make matters worse, while the Riel situation was still present, a new fear materialized on the North Western expanse: Fenians. Although the Fenian raid on Manitoba would not happen until the next year, in the spring of 1870 articles were appearing in the *Baptist* that all but promised imminent violence from the despised Irish-Americans. Davidson and Baldwin had used the wide-open expanse of the west as a motivating factor to bring Baptists in but now the lack of ability to defend Red River could be seen as a deterrent. The *Baptist* wrote: "[Fenians are] mustering . . . in various parts of Minnesota, and one party is now en route overland. There is now at St. Paul a Fenian force of about 300, awaiting arrangements for transportation and subsistence before commencing the march to Red River."<sup>83</sup> Adding to the apprehension about heading west were reports that as the military went to Red River, the Fenians would simply switch their target from the North West to Toronto and Montreal. The

81. Davidson and Baldwin, "The Great North West," *Canadian Baptist*, 12 August 1869, 2.

82. Davidson and Baldwin, "Report of the Deputation of the North West Territories," *Canadian Baptist Register*, 1870, 48.

83. "Fenians and Red River," *The Canadian Baptist*, 19 May 1870, 3. The Baptists also used this as an opportunity to condemn what they thought was cowardly and negligent behavior on the part of the American government. The following quote is an example: "This opportunity [the raid] would not have been afforded if the United States authorities had done their duty in season" ("The Fenian Raid," *The Canadian Baptist*, 2 June 1870, 3).

fears of a Fenian takeover of Canada are present in the following quote:

A portion of the regular force had been recalled to England, and a large detachment of those left had already begun the march Red Riverward. This was the moment of all others for a Fenian invasion, and had these deluded Irishmen been led by men of the average ability of school boys, they would, as we have said, penetrated to the very verge of the metropolis of the Dominion.<sup>84</sup>

Although this comment is blatantly condescending to the Fenians, it appears that there existed awareness that if the Fenians ever got capable leadership they could do some real damage. The idea that Ontario could be taken while its citizens moved west could do nothing to advance the Baptist mission.<sup>85</sup>

84. "Red River Difficulty," *The Canadian Baptist*, 23 June 1870, 3. When the Fenian threat actually materialized in October of 1871 it did more to undermine the Fenians than cause fear in the hearts of the Canadians. The Fenians took a fort at Pembina but ran out of supplies and went back across the border without incident. Volunteers from all over the region came together to challenge the Fenians but the two armies never met. There was no battle, no bloodshed, and the Fenian threat was extinguished, never to appear again. Had it not been for the victory at Limeridge and the taking of Ft. Erie in 1866, the Fenians would have been nothing more than a bad joke to the Canadians. But, since the 1866 incident, the Canadians did take any Fenian threats seriously. For more on the Churches and the Fenian threat of 1866, see Robertson, "A Very Present Help."

85. There is one threat that also materialized and would have been detrimental to the Baptist mission but since it received very little coverage in the press I have chosen to restrict it to the footnotes. Since the land was seen as incredibly valuable, Baldwin and Davidson were concerned about potential threats to its productivity. During the course of their travels one threat seemed to stand above the rest: grasshoppers. Davidson made this comment: "everything depends, so to speak, on the grasshoppers. If they visit the settlements this year and do the work of utter devastation they did last year, immigration from Canada will be checked and many who are now in the country will leave it" (Davidson, "The Great North-West," *Canadian Baptist*, 2 September 1869, 2). After the insurrection it appears that the fears of Davidson and Baldwin came true. Although there is no mention as to what kind of damage was done, there were reports that grasshoppers were in abundance on the prairie around Red River. The *Canadian Baptist* reported: "There is but little news for the North-

Another way the Riel insurgence impacted the Baptist mission was that animosity towards Catholics, which was noticeably absent in 1869, reared up in 1870. The Baptists had always lamented the fact that other denominations had traveled west before they had, but during the insurrection the Catholic Church was singled out as a potential obstruction to the improvement of the west. The Métis's French ethnicity was also bitterly referenced. One issue recorded the following sentiment:

[Manitoba is in] the hands of *French*—not even *Canadian*—priests, which will place the most stubborn if not the most insurmountable barrier in the way of opening up and improving that Western country . . . It is not easy to conceive a more non-improveable [sic] or non progressive people than Roman Catholic priests and half-breeds.<sup>86</sup>

Since the Catholics were the dominant religious influence among the Métis<sup>87</sup> the Roman Church became an easy target for the Baptist press. The *Register* lamented Baptist tardiness in getting to the frontier and openly acknowledged that the wasted time would create more work in establishing a Baptist presence. At the end of the year it was recorded, “The labour of the denomination has been increased perhaps ten fold by its tardiness of action in regard to mission work in the beginning of villages, towns, and cities.”<sup>88</sup>

The Baptist mission to the west was usurped by the political reality of the land it had been attempting to convince its readers was peaceful and safe. There was little point in “selling” the west to its readership while someone like Riel was in control. During

West and traders report business quiet and everything status quo. The *New Nation* of the 8<sup>th</sup> says: Grasshoppers have appeared in many parts of the settlement; they almost cover the face of the earth . . . it is impossible to foretell the extent of the damage they may yet cause” (“The Scourge of Grasshoppers: Manitoba,” *Canadian Baptist*, 28 July 1870, 2).

86. “The Political Situation,” *Canadian Baptist*, 26 May 1870, 3.

87. “Of the 14,000 inhabitants, not less than 5,000 or 6,000 are Roman Catholics; priestcraft dates coeval with the Settlement itself” (Davidson and Baldwin, “Report of the Deputation of the North West Territories,” *Canadian Baptist Register*, 1870, 49).

88. Davidson and Baldwin, “Report of the Deputation of the North West Territories,” *Canadian Baptist Register*, 1870, 51.

those few months the *Canadian Baptist* decided to put the topic on the back burner and used its influence to inform its readers about the most recent struggle embroiling the nation of Canada. The facts gathered by the *Baptist* were spurious at best and while the paper was not hesitant to impugn Riel's character it did reflect an internal struggle within the Baptist church on which course of action best suited the conflict. Most editorials were designed to paint Riel as an unpopular criminal perpetually on the brink of defeat and none were supportive of Riel or his government.

At the conclusion of the insurgence in the summer of 1870, the *Canadian Baptist* and *Register* showed little interest in returning to the topic of western emigration. The 1871 *Register* did not even mention the North West once and the *Baptist* switched its focus from Riel to Napoleon for the course of the year. Although there are occasional mentions of the western territory, they are few and far between and lack the drive of their pre-rebellion counterparts.

However, just over a year after the Riel situation ended, mention of Baptists in the west began to re-emerge. W. J. Copp of Hamilton apparently took the cause of the western expansion up and proposed that the issue be raised again. The *Baptist* printed the following statement:

[T]he following resolution was passed, after having been highly recommended by several able speeches: "That we give our candid and serious attention to the propriety of forwarding Bro. Copp's movement to send a Missionary to Manitoba, inasmuch as we do not wish our beloved denomination, and the principles to which we so tenaciously cling, to go unrepresented in that region."<sup>89</sup>

While the cause was working its way back to the front, the focus had changed from promoting the safety and beauty of the land to encouraging a sense of adventure and a willingness to endure dangers for the sake of the Gospel. The following quote

89. "Communications: Manitoba," *Canadian Baptist*, 28 September 1871, 2.

is an example: “We require a man, or *men*, who are fearless in *attack* and *able* to, ‘push the battle to the gates’; then success is covenanted and sure.”<sup>90</sup> In order to combat those who might bring financial concerns to bear on the matter it was proposed to find 100 Baptist families who would contribute ten dollars for three years to cover the cost of sending a missionary to the west.

The *Register*, after a year hiatus from the topic, also began to approach the subject. In the 1872 issue the following appeared:

In this, as the best connection, we record the fact that a Committee, consisting of Revs. Dr. Fyfe, John Torrance and others, was appointed to consider the duty of the Baptists of Ontario, to send a Missionary or Missionaries to Manitoba, at as early a day as possible. The Committee had a lengthened and earnest conference on the subject.<sup>91</sup>

Although this quote may seem to be about little more than discussion, it is worth noting that in the next year’s *Register* the choice of a missionary for the North West was finally made. The following was recorded, “Rev. Dr Fyfe, chairman of the Committee appointed to select a missionary for Manitoba, reported that the services of Rev. Alexander MacDonald, of Sparta, had been secured.”<sup>92</sup> The steps were small and late in coming but the signs were clear: the mission to the west had returned.

In conclusion, the power of the Baptist press was put to use to insure the spread of the Baptist message to the largely unexplored North West Territory throughout 1869 and 1870. Using biblical imagery, appeals to evangelism and national prosperity, fear of American domination, imperialism, and the fertility of the land, the Baptist Church attempted to influence its members to look west in hopes of further increasing the Baptist influence on the Canadian landscape. However, the Riel insurrection, more than any other factor, derailed the Baptist attempt at western emigration because it undermined the positive traits that

90. Ibid. (italics part of the original quote).

91. “Committee on Missions to Manitoba,” *Canadian Baptist Register*, October 1872, 17.

92. “Mission to Manitoba,” *Canadian Baptist Register*, October, 1873, 15–16.

Davidson and Baldwin had attempted to bring to the potentially dangerous and fearsome expedition. The evidence of the unstable political climate in the land overshadowed the conjecture and words of the two missionaries in much the same way as Joshua and Caleb's words fell on deaf Israelite ears after the people heard the reports of giants in their own Promised Land. The reports of Riel's rebellion and the Métis's violent ways brought what was originally a popular idea to a halt. Those who wanted to see the western expansion materialize were forced to change their focus in the wake of the troubles of 1869–1870. C. C. McLaurin, writing on this topic, made the following comments:

Political turmoil was another condition which did nothing to help the work of our early missionaries in Western Canada. Peaceful, happy, domestic life was well nigh impossible . . . During all this turmoil [Riel] the Baptists in Ontario were making plans. Missionaries of other religious bodies were arriving, settlers were pouring into the country, and churches were being established. This uncertain state of "law and order" retarded the settlement of the country for a time.<sup>93</sup>

Thus the focus of the *Baptist* from 1871 was less on personal or national gain and more on brave people going to spread the Gospel of Christ in a foreign land.

Whereas problems with finances and within the Ontario Home Mission cannot be forgotten, the gap from 1869—when the mission was first brought to the fore—until the first residential missionary set foot on western ground in 1873, is best explained by the instability of the region in question. After all, once the area had calmed for a time and the motion was back on the table the western expansion moved along with no further stops.

Alexander "Pioneer" MacDonald did tremendous work in Red River and beyond. Baptists responded to the idea of supporting the mission for three years out of their own pockets quite

93. McLaurin, *Pioneering in Western Canada*, 61–63.

positively; other ministers began to arrive<sup>94</sup> and in 1879 a former Roman Catholic priest by the name of A. C. Turner was the first Baptist minister ordained in the west. In 1880 the Red River Baptist Association was formed, which included a church from Riel's former stronghold in Fort Garry.<sup>95</sup> Although the Baptist growth in the west was not rapid, their presence was entrenched and the land that had once been nothing more than a howling wilderness was on its way to becoming the garden the Baptist Church had hoped it might become.

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94. Most notably William Murden, who worked north of Winnipeg in and around the town of Gladstone.

95. For more on the development of the Red River Association see Renfree, *Heritage and Horizon*, 176. By then Fort Garry was known as Winnipeg and the other three churches were Emerson, Stonewall, and High Bluff.

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