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1994

Review of Metis Lands in Manitoba.

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Foster, John E., "Review of Metis Lands in Manitoba." (1994). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 841.
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Métis Lands in Manitoba. By Thomas Flanagan. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1991. Preface, bibliography. x + 245 pp. \$17.95 paper.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Dominion of Canada allotted over 1,400,000 acres of crown land in Manitoba to the province's Métis inhabitants as "Half Breed Scrip." The "fairness" of the process of distributing this scrip is the subject of Flanagan's work. Of greater interest to many readers is Flanagan's criticism of advocacy scholarship as it has emerged on the subject of half breed scrip in Manitoba.

Early in his discussion Flanagan argues that a scholar's motives in undertaking a particular project should not matter. If the methodological canons of scholarship have been observed and the publication process has involved scholarly criticism, then scholarship should be accepted or rejected on these grounds. Yet for Flanagan scholarly practice in many instances is another matter. In his review of the literature he is at pains to note the involvement of several scholars in litigation involving the Manitoba Métis Association and the Canadian federal government. For Flanagan there is a relationship between the historical school that sees the Federal and Provincial governments as "demons" and the Métis as "victims"

and scholars who openly sympathize with current Métis activists' interests: a relationship of poor scholarship. In some instances one senses that Flanagan feels the quality of such scholarship borders on malpractice.

Flanagan is quick to acknowledge that his own involvement as a research consultant for the federal government in current legal actions may influence his perspective, but need not, should not, detract from a sound scholarly product. Scholarly methodology should guard against scholarly malpractice. By implication Flanagan's study is the confirmation of this aphorism.

Flanagan argues forcefully that in terms of allocating half breed scrip, neither the Manitoba or Dominion government were "demons," nor the Métis in the generation after The Transfer "victims." Individual instances of abuse can be found among all the parties involved. Yet the overwhelming weight of the surviving record argues for "fairness." In the context of the times the Métis "profited," some very handsomely.

How, then, did the disbursement of half breed scrip enter the folk history as "fraud" and "victimization"? Flanagan suggests the explanation lies with two competing views among the Métis at the time of the purpose of the 1,400,000 acres allotted to the half breed scrip disbursement. One view, most cogently expressed by Father Ritchot, one of Louis Riel's principal advisers and the leading figure in negotiations with the Canadian government, saw the 1,400,000 acres as a single contiguous block, the basis for sustaining a separate socio-cultural community in the face of the surge of incoming, largely "Upper Canadian," settlers. Most of the Métis, however, apparently shared the governments' perspectives that the land was for individual allotment in a number of locales with the individual rather than the community controlling decisions over its disposal. In the twentieth century, with the support of some academics, it has become fashionable for political activists to push the Ritchot view.

For some writers on the subject, historical failure of Ritchot's view requires an explanation invoking government demons and Métis victims.

The relevance of Flanagan's study to scholarship goes well beyond that of the subject matter itself. In calling attention to the "self-serving" nature of some writing cloaking itself in the mantle of sound scholarship, he highlights the necessity of continuous rigorous criticism in the scholarly process. In terms of his study's particular subject, Flanagan's work would appear to be the definitive statement on half breed scrip in Manitoba.

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