



Gabriel Dumont

Estate of George Woodcock

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The struggle of the Métis of the Saskatchewan River against the government of Canada culminated in the Riel Rebellion of 1885—an event of central importance in shaping almost all of the key polarities of Canadian history. If Riel provided the intellectual inspiration for the Rebellion, it was Gabriel Dumont who provided its strategy, and arguably its soul. Dumont, a leading figure in the Métis society of hunters along the South Saskatchewan, had been president of the short-lived local government, and became "Adjutant General of the Métis people" when a Provisional Government was declared in 1885. After the defeat of the Rebellion by the Canadian militia Dumont lived for several years in the United States, and was for some time a performer in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. In his last years he returned to his old home near Batoche (site of the final defeat of the Métis forces in 1885), where he died in 1906.

George Woodcock's biography of Dumont displays the author's remarkable gift for evocative narration and description. In the wake of its 1975 publication Canadians had a new reference point in the way they thought of the Riel Rebellion; alongside the spirituality and impulsiveness of Riel was the calm commitment of Dumont, whose intuitive feel for the land and for the moods of his people have now become part of the Canadian historical imagination.

For this re-issue of Woodcock's classic biography noted historian J.R. Miller has written a substantial introduction setting Gabriel Dumont in the context of Canadian history as we now understand it, in the context of Canadian historiography, and in the context of Woodcock's other work. As Miller convincingly argues, the biography is richly deserving of a lasting place in Canada's historical literature.

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