

book reviews

GABRIEL DUMONT: A look at one of the leaders of the Northwest Rebellion and his role in the events that fashioned Canadian history, by George Woodcock. Hurtig Publishers, 10560-105 Street, Edmonton, Alta. T5H 2W7 Pp. 280, Illustrated, Publ. November 7, 1975, \$8.95.

George Woodcock has undertaken to write fairly and impartially about one of the lesser chronicled men in Canadian history. His account tackles the question of why Louis Riel, the indecisive, religious zealot is more studied and revered than is Dumont, the man of action and decision.

Dumont, a Métis of French and Sarcee Indian decent, was introduced at an early age to a life of trapping, hunting and the nomadic lifestyle of the prairie dwellers. His knowledge of the wild was superior to many older men, as was his ability to shoot straight, ride hard and think clearly. Added to that was his ability to speak French and six Indian languages, but virtually no English.

The author describes in detail the annual buffalo hunts and the rules under which the entire caravan operated. These rules formed the basis of the Métis social fabric and they were later adapted for use by the local council formed to maintain order in the community of St. Laurent. It illustrated how the prairie society was organized around harvesting the buffalo and underscores the utter tragedy to these people when the buffalo were ruthlessly slaughtered.

By 1862, the buffalo were no longer plentiful, fishing was poor and the great plains people began to know real hunger. They slowly came to realize that the only salvation was in farming and many of them staked out land tracts; long narrow strips running back from a river, very similar to the first French settlers in Quebec. Dumont took up farming as well as operating a ferry across the Saskatchewan River, and there lived a normal life, neither poor nor affluent by local standards. His leadership was still recognized, for he was elected as chief of a council whose purpose was to establish laws and maintain order in St. Laurent. Their experiment was a success, and peace reigned in the village for several years.

By 1880, the massive buffalo hunts were virtually over. Sir John A. MacDonald's government had returned to power in 1878. As Minister responsible for the Department of the Interior, he was insensitive to the needs of the Métis and Indians, although he had ample warning that procrastination would lead to serious trouble. The Métis were vociferous in requests for representation on Territorial Councils and for settlement of their land claims. Ottawa did not heed the warnings and rebellion broke out.

The indecisive Riel remained at Batoche, was captured, tried, executed and became a symbol of the divisions in the Canadian consciousness. The decisive Dumont fled to the U.S.A., where his popularity slowly faded and he was soon all but forgotten. Yet it would be difficult to choose another Canadian whose life had more impact on the growth and development of the Western Prairies. One cannot help but speculate how our history would have changed had Dumont been able to prod Riel into action.

This is a book about a Métis chief, of their life in a world carved out of the wilderness, a world which was lost to an onrushing civilization. If Woodcock set out to tell this story, he succeeded admirably. L.P.K.

SCENIC WONDERS OF CANADA: An illustrated guide to our natural splendors, published by The Reader's Digest Association (Canada) Ltd., 215 Redfern Ave., Montreal, Que. in conjunction with the Canadian Automobile Association; 150 Gloucester, Ottawa, Ont.; February, 1976; Paul Minvielle, Editor; 384 pages size 9 x 12 inches, 440 colour photographs, 150 illustrations, 50 maps, Price \$24.95.

I was watching an interview on T.V. this Spring where the interviewee commented on how Canadians tended to go South for their summer holidays, and when asked why this was so, the person said that it was probably a case of advertising, that many Canadians knew more about American points of interest than they did of Canada's. I wondered why no one had ever published an in-depth look at