THE ROLE OF THE SASKATCHEWAN HERALD IN THE CONSTRUCTION AND EXTENT OF THE “SIEGE OF BATTLEFORD”

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By

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Megan Lee-Ann Clake, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in History, has presented a thesis titled, *The Role of The Saskatchewan Herald in the Construction and Extent of the “Siege of Battleford”*, in an oral examination held on April 13, 2015. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role played by The Saskatchewan Herald in the construction of the circumstances that led to the 1885 Siege of Battleford. Generally discussed only as a peripheral event of the North-West Rebellion, the Siege of Battleford involved approximately five hundred men, women and children who congregated within the walls of a small North-West Mounted Police fort. Terrified of the intentions of their First Nations neighbours, the ‘siege’ lasted for more than a month and ended only with the arrival of Colonel William Dillon Otter’s column of the North-West Field Force. The self-protective action taken by the citizens of the Battleford area is unique within Aboriginal conflicts of nineteenth-century North America, and is especially notable in terms of the duration of the voluntary occupation of Fort Battleford.

As recent scholarship has established that the citizens of Battleford greatly exaggerated the danger of Poundmaker’s Cree and other local First Nations bands, this paper explores the circumstances surrounding the decision to occupy Fort Battleford. The pages of the local newspaper, The Saskatchewan Herald, provide valuable insight into the community of Battleford in the 1880s. By examining the Herald alongside other primary sources and theoretical works, this thesis is able to explore the significant role played by the Herald in creating the conditions that led to the Siege of Battleford. Special attention is given to the analysis of the portrayal of First Nations individuals in the print media of Battleford and beyond.
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The Role of *The Saskatchewan Herald* in the Construction and Extent of the “Siege of Battleford”

Beginning on 29 March 1885, the desertion of the homes and businesses of the Battleford district of the North-West Territories in exchange for the perceived safety of the North-West Mounted Police’s Fort Battleford, marked the beginning of what is generally referred to as the “Siege of Battleford”.  

1 Rumours regarding the intentions of a group of about one hundred First Nations men and women from local reserves moving in the direction of the community of Battleford (see Illustration 1.1), triggered this relocation, which saw panicked residents leaving behind virtually all of their possessions in what they deemed to be a race against time.  

2 Over the course of the next thirty nights, the citizens of the Battleford area remained crowded in the poorly-provisioned North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) fort, watching the initial looting of their town by Poundmaker’s Cree, as well as its further looting and subsequent burning by a small number of Métis.  

3 It was not until several days after Lieutenant Colonel William Dillon Otter’s column of the North-West Field Force arrived at Battleford on 24 April that the scared citizens reluctantly returned to their homes.  

In recent years, an examination of

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1 Although the events that took place in Battleford in March and April of 1885 do not meet any standard dictionary definition of the word “siege”, the expression “Siege of Battleford” will be used in this paper to ensure consistency, as it is the terminology used in all but the most recent sources, and accurately represents the language used by those who sought shelter in Fort Battleford to describe these events.

2 The Salteaux were often referred to as the Stoney in late 19th and early 20th century publications. When possible, specific groups will be referred to by leader and nation (i.e. Poundmaker’s Cree). The term “First Nations” or “Indigenous” will be used throughout this paper to refer to treaty and treaty-eligible First Nations peoples.

3 Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2007), 102. During the siege, those within the walls of Fort Battleford believed that all of the looting and burning was perpetrated by local First Nations bands.
Illustration 1.1: Western Canada circa 1885

the past characterisation of these events and how they should be defined and commemorated has attracted the attention of the media.⁴

Although generally characterized as a peripheral event of the North-West (or Riel) Rebellion, an analysis of recent scholarship, combined with a careful reading of primary documentation, clearly establishes that the settlers in Battleford had an exaggerated impression of their vulnerability to First Nations attack, that the Rebellion was merely a backdrop to the siege, and that the situation faced by Battleford area residents cannot be accurately described as a siege.

Despite this reflection on the events that took place in Battleford during March and April 1885, the circumstances and beliefs that led to the abandonment of the town of Battleford require further investigation. Although there were a number of other communities, such as Edmonton and Prince Albert, located in close proximity to the major events of the Rebellion, it was only in Battleford that this type of self-protective action was sustained.⁵ The extent and duration of the defensive position taken by the citizens of Battleford is unique within the larger narrative of the North-West Rebellion and, as such, deserves further historical attention.⁶ Unquestionably, the citizens of

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⁵ Although the term has been controversial, “Rebellion” can correctly be used to describe the events of the spring of 1885, as the legitimacy of the government of the North-West Territories was firmly established by this time. This is a sharp contrast to the much murkier situation in Red River in 1869-70, which can more accurately be described as a “resistance”.

⁶ The North-West Rebellion is generally considered to have started with the taking of hostages and declaration of a Métis provisional government by Louis Riel on 18 March 1885. Generally, the following military engagements between the Métis and government troops as well as between various First Nations groups and government troops are considered to comprise the Rebellion: The Battle of Duck Lake (26 March 1885), the Siege of Battleford (beginning 29 March 1885), the Frog Lake Massacre (2 April 1885), Battle of Fort Pitt (15 April 1885), the Battle of Fish Creek (24 April 1885), the Battle of Cut Knife Creek (2 May 1885), the Battle of Batoche (9-12 May 1885), the Battle of Frenchman’s Butte (28 May 1885),
Battleford were extremely fearful of their First Nations neighbours, especially the Cree bands led by chiefs Pîtikwahanapiwîyin (Poundmaker), and the more geographically distant Mistahimaskwa (Big Bear), but the manner by which this fear developed and was fostered has not been adequately explored.\(^7\) This paper seeks to begin the exploration of this topic by examining the role of the *Saskatchewan Herald*, both as a major factor in both the construction of the circumstances that led to the Siege of Battleford and in the duration of the event itself.

There is a large body of historical literature that encompasses the North-West Rebellion of 1885. Much of it consists of general histories of the Rebellion, but the literature is also peppered with works that focus on a few select individual participants and battles. As a result, even when taken collectively, the existing works do not adequately examine the build-up to the decision by the citizens of the Battleford area to retreat to the NWMP fort. The broadly-focused general histories of the Rebellion are challenging to use as sources for a study of the Siege of Battleford. As a rule, the siege is commonly relegated to only a small portion of a chapter, and is often mentioned only as a preface to the Battle of Cut Knife Hill, fought between Lieutenant-Colonel Otter’s column of the North-West Field Force and Poundmaker’s Cree on 2 May 1885. George Stanley’s *The Birth of Western Canada*\(^8\) is one example of this approach.

The historical works on of the North-West Rebellion can be divided roughly into three categories. The first, containing works spanning more than a century, encompasses the general histories of the Rebellion. Charles Pelham Mulvany’s *The History of the Battle of Loon Lake* (3 June 1885). The Rebellion is generally considered to have ended with the surrender of Big Bear at Fort Carleton on 2 July 1885.

\(^7\) In the interest of maintaining consistency with newspaper and eyewitness accounts, these two chiefs will be referred to by their English names in this paper.

North-West Rebellion of 1885 was the first such large-scale history, and was published a mere six months after the conclusion of hostilities. Mulvany, a former cleric turned author and historian was not present in the North-West Territories during the Rebellion, and his work plays heavily on the biases of English Canadians in the 1880s. In his introduction, Mulvany clearly explains the motivation for his work: “to-day Canada has just shaken herself free from the clutches of Rebellion, which at one time threatened to bring with her sisters Anarchy and Revolution. Somebody is to blame for all this...[emphasis added]”. While provocative, The History of the North-West Rebellion of 1885 suffers from historical inaccuracies and biases, as well as a lack of documentation; Mulvany does not reveal the sources behind much of his information. That being said, the book does allow the historian a window into some of the prejudices and understandings of late nineteenth-century English Canadians towards Aboriginal peoples – be they Métis or First Nations.

It was half a century before the next major comprehensive work on the North-West Rebellion was released. Stanley’s The Birth of Western Canada, originally published in 1935 and subsequently re-released in 1960, examines the causes and lasting impacts of the North-West Rebellion of 1885 as well as the earlier uprising by the Métis of the Red River Settlement in 1869. He also examines the subsequent creation of the province of Manitoba in 1870. Stanley describes the Rebellion through the lens of frontier theory, a model first put forward by American historian Frederick J. Turner in his 1894 book Significance of the Frontier in American History. The Birth of Western


\footnote{Mulvany, *A History of the North-West Rebellion of 1885*, vii.}
Canada suggests that “both the Manitoba insurrection and the Saskatchewan rebellion were the manifestation in Western Canada of the problem of the frontier, namely the clash between primitive and civilized peoples.”

Using a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, Stanley’s work provides a good overview of the events of 1885, although his analysis is somewhat limited by his rigorous adherence to frontier theory as the sole cause of the Rebellion.

Desmond Morton expands upon Stanley’s work in his 1972 book, The Last War Drum. As a military history, The Last War Drum focuses attention on the march of General Frederick Dobson Middleton, his column of the North-West Field Force and its involvement in both the largest and most militarily significant engagements – the Battle of Fish Creek and the Battle of Batoche. Despite its primary focus on Middleton’s column, Morton also examines the march of Otter’s column to the relief of Battleford and the subsequent Battle of Cut Knife Hill. Although useful in examining the military aspects of the North-West Rebellion, The Last War Drum offers little background information as to the causes and the events that led up to the Rebellion, which are characterised simply as the “last desperate chance for Indians and Métis to impose their own terms on the settlement of the West.”

A useful addition to the historical records, the compiled Telegrams of the North-West Campaign, with commentary by Desmond Morton and Reginald H. Roy, contains all of the official telegrams sent during the North-West Rebellion. Telegrams of the

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12 Stanley, The Birth of Western Canada, viii.
14 Ibid., ix.
*North-West Campaign* provides a glimpse into Fort Battleford itself, as it contains a number of telegrams from within the stockade. In addition, the telegrams provide insight into the inner workings of the North-West Field Force and the role played by the Canadian government in the suppression of the Rebellion.

The most recent comprehensive study of the North-West Rebellion is Bob Beal and Rod Macleod’s *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion*\(^\text{16}\) which was published on the eve of the centennial of the conflict. In contrast to earlier comprehensive works, Beal and Macleod identify not one, but a number of causes that contributed to the Rebellion. They conclude that “[the Rebellion’s] causes are to be found partly in carelessness and incompetence, partly in deliberate acts that were the equivalent of setting a match to dry grass, and partly in plain bad luck.”\(^\text{17}\) They contend that First Nations, Métis, and white settlers all had their own grievances that contributed to the rising tension and eventual conflict in the Saskatchewan district. Contained within its pages are descriptions of the major battles and events of the conflict, as well as of the trials that occurred in the aftermath of the fighting.

Collectively, these books are useful in identifying the main events of the conflict and in analyzing the larger situation, but they have a number of limitations. By their very nature, comprehensive histories do not provide the level of detail needed to understand every incident within a large event, such as the Siege of Battleford within the North-West Rebellion. As a result, the use of other types of historical documentation is required to get a more complete understanding of the siege. It is here that the second


\(^{17}\) Ibid, 11.
category of writings on the Rebellion, consisting of memoirs and personal narratives of individuals finds a place in the historical record. These provide eyewitness accounts of the events of March and April 1885. One of the most valuable contributions in this category is Robert Jefferson’s *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan*, published in 1929. Jefferson provides a unique perspective of the events that transpired in Battleford, as he served as the Farm Instructor on Poundmaker’s reserve from 1882 to mid-1885. He provides a first-hand description of the mood in Poundmaker’s camp in early 1885, including during the month of the siege itself. His personal account provides insight into the actions and possible motivations of Poundmaker’s band during the period in question, which Jefferson refers to in his book as the “So-called Siege of Battleford”. Generally, Jefferson is sympathetic to the situation that Poundmaker’s Cree faced in the spring of 1885, although he is critical of those who committed crimes during the Rebellion, regardless of race.

A number of other personal recollections and memoirs were published by former members of the North-West Field Force. These include *Major Boulton on the North West Rebellions*, Thomas Bland Strange’s *Gunner Jingo’s jubilee*, published in 1893, and a compilation of the writings of force commander General Middleton, published in 1948 under the title *Suppression of the rebellion in the North-West Territories of Canada*.

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19 Ibid., 104.
20 Ibid., 127.
In addition, a compilation of the recollections of three members of the North-West Field Force was issued in 1983 as *Reminiscences of a Bungle by one of the Bunglers and Two Other Northwest Rebellion Diaries*, under the editorship of R.C. Macleod. While they do not provide much information on the situation in Battleford, these works offer useful insight into the motivations and experiences of those who volunteered for service in the North-West Rebellion, as well as those who led them.

A number of miscellaneous memoirs have also been published. One of the most well-known is *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear*, which relates the experiences of Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney. Beginning with the Frog Lake Massacre, where Gowanlock and Delaney were present for the murder of their husbands, the recollections also include the subsequent period of confinement experienced by the authors in the camp of Big Bear’s Cree. Published in November 1885, this account promised to “give the public a truthful and accurate description of [the] capture, detention and misfortunes [of Gowanlock and Delaney] while captive in the camp of Big Bear.” The ultimate accuracy of these recollections cannot be definitively known, but they do provide another perspective to the Rebellion. Finally, the perspective of local clergy is provided in both *The Making of the Canadian West being the Reminiscences of an Eyewitness*, by Reverend R.G. MacBeth, published in 1898, and *The Reminiscences of

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25 Theresa Delaney and Theresa Gowanlock, *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear* (Parkdale, ON: Times, 1885).
26 Ibid., 3.
Louis Cochin, published in 1927. Both MacBeth and Cochin were present in the North-West during the events of the Rebellion. Of the two, Cochin’s account is more useful for the study of the events in Battleford, as he was present in Poundmaker’s camp in April 1885. He is also able to present an eyewitness account of the Battle of Cut Knife Hill.

These memoirs, while illuminated, must be approached with great care. Sarah Carter, in her analysis of the accounts presented in Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear, eloquently observes the limitations of reminiscences: “To enhance our thinking and understanding of 1885 we need to appreciate that sources such as Two Months are problematic and selective, and we need to pay attention to the perspective of many others involved in order to portray a more varied and complicated past.” In addition to this selectiveness, many of the memoirs were written a number of years after the events of the Rebellion, which leaves questions as to the reliability of the accounts. Finally, the specific motivation for publishing each memoir must be considered carefully. Middleton, Strange and Boulton, for example, were at least partially motivated by the desire to justify their actions and decisions, while Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney were likely inspired in part by the desire to receive government pensions to compensate for the loss of their husbands. Looking past the shortcomings inherent in the use of memoirs as historical sources, it is important to note that although there are several accounts from Euro-Canadians who had close relationships with members of

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29 Cochin, The Reminiscences of Louis Cochin, 32.
30 Sarah Carter, “Captured Women”: A Re-examination of the Stories of Theresa Delaney and Theresa Gowanlock” in Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear (Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1999), ix.
31 Ibid., xxxii.
various First Nations bands, there are no written first-hand descriptions of the Rebellion from this perspective, leaving an unfortunate gap in the historical literature.

As well as to the general works on the topic of the North-West Rebellion and the personal recollections, there are a number of highly-focused works that contribute to the historical record. The third category of publications examines the specific events and themes within the North-West Rebellion. Books in this category are varied, and range from the many biographies of Louis Riel, such as Tom Flanagan’s 1979 *Louis “David” Riel: prophet of the new world*[^32] and Maggie Siggins’ 1994 bestselling biography *Riel, A Life of Revolution*,[^33] to works about specific events and battles, such as Stuart Hughes’ 1976 *The Frog Lake “Massacre”*.[^34] Three books in this category are particularly influential in the study of the events in Battleford. These are *Loyal Till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion*[^35] by Bill Waiser and Blair Stonechild, *Views From Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West*[^36] by Walter Hildebrandt, and *Footprints in the Dust*[^37] by Douglas W. Light.

*Loyal Till Death*, published in 1997, examines the events of the North-West Rebellion from the perspective of the First Nations bands of the North-West Territories, and describes the Siege of Battleford in some detail, as are the conditions and circumstances that preceded the outbreak of hostilities in the spring of 1885. Utilizing

[^36]: Walter Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2008).
oral accounts from First Nations elders, *Loyal Till Death* also addresses the lack of First Nations perspective in the literature concerning the Rebellion. Although the use of oral accounts often leads to questions of accuracy, Stonechild and Waiser combine these with meticulous research, and as a result *Loyal Till Death* is a highly useful resource. Although Walter Hildebrandt’s 2008 book *Views From Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West* mainly focuses on the role played by the NWMP in the settlement and construction of what is now Western Canada it, too, contains an illuminating chapter on Fort Battleford in 1885, as well as providing useful contextual information about the town and its population. Published in 1987 by Douglas Light, *Footprints in the Dust* provides a day-by-day narrative account of the events of the North-West Rebellion with a particular focus on those events that affected Battleford. Despite containing minimal footnotes, *Footprints in the Dust* provides the clearest timeline detailing the day-to-day experience of the citizens of Battleford during March and April 1885. Although these three works contribute to the historical understanding of the Siege of Battleford, they still do not provide an adequate exploration of the underpinning motives and perceptions of the citizenry of the Battleford area leading up to the siege.

In order to appreciate how print media contributed to the creation of the Siege of Battleford, an understanding of the role played by the media in portraying various Aboriginal and non-dominant cultures, as well as the general function of the media within late nineteenth century society is critical. The media’s portrayal of Aboriginal groups in North America is a well-researched topic, with analyses from both Canadian and American perspectives. One of the most recent works on this topic is *Seeing Red: A*
“History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers” by Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen L. Robertson. *Seeing Red* examines the ways in which Canada’s English-language newspapers have portrayed Aboriginal peoples since Confederation, and it provides analysis of the media coverage of the 1885 Rebellion, as well as many other important Canadian events. Anderson and Robertson identify a number of themes that characterise the general treatment of Aboriginal groups by the press throughout Canada’s history. *Seeing Red* asserts that “the idea that Canadians of Aboriginal ancestry epitomise moral depravity is as old as the press in Canada… [it] finds expression in a variety of ways, including identified sneakiness, poor parenting, thievery, whorishness, dishonesty, laziness, ungodliness…” By focussing primarily on large (and mostly Eastern) newspapers, *Seeing Red* demonstrates the role of mass media in creating a negative image of Aboriginal groups for the majority of Canadians, and in examining themes in this coverage. This, in turn, helps to provide a lens for the examination of the *Herald*.

John M. Coward’s *The Newspaper Indian: Native American Identity in the Press, 1820 – 90*, describes a similar situation in the United States. It provides insight into the media treatment of Aboriginal peoples within North America over a seventy-year period. Coward explains that “news about Indians was created, organized, and received in ways that supported Euro-American ideas and challenged or ignored native ones.” *The Newspaper Indian* also further contributes to an understanding of the general themes in

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this coverage. As well, Mary Ann Weston’s *Native Americans in the News: Images of Indians in the Twentieth Century Press*\(^{42}\) includes analysis of the practices used by journalists in writing stories for mass consumption and examines the language and vocabulary used by reporters, the form and organization of individual stories and even the selection of which news is reported.

The role of newspapers in understanding the past has been clearly demonstrated by historians. A number of general histories of the media in North America also contribute to the understanding of the role of the newspaper during the late nineteenth-century. David Paul Nord’s *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers*,\(^{43}\) in addition to looking at the history of the newspaper as a medium within the United States, also provides a good description of the role played by these newspapers in creating and shaping American society. Similarly, both *The Making of the Canadian Media*\(^{44}\) by Paul Rutherford and Douglas Fetherling’s *The Rise of the Canadian Newspaper*\(^{45}\) provide increased understanding in this area with their useful explorations of the history of the newspaper in Canada, including analysis of readership and content.

A number of general works concerning the media and society are highly useful to understanding the means by which newspapers have affected the wider world. Although not an exhaustive list, the following works contributed greatly to understanding the role


of the newspaper within a specific community such as Battleford. *Responsibility in Mass Communication*,\(^{46}\) edited by William L. Rivers and Wilbur Schramm, for example, provides a useful description of the functions of mass communications, as well as a useful case study of the role played by mass media in the race riots of the past century. Sociologist Todd Gitlin, in *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*,\(^{47}\) discusses the use of frames within the media. Gitlin defines these frames as “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters.”\(^{48}\) Gitlin goes on to argue that framing (or stereotyping) is such a common feature of the media because it reduces the amount of background information necessary for the audience to understand a story. As a result, “stereotyping solves an enormous number of practical problems for journalism.”\(^{49}\) By regularly reinforcing stereotypes about certain groups, journalists and editors were able to assume that all readers had the same understanding and mental image, simplifying the reporting of stories relating to individuals within the categorized groups.

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*\(^{50}\) considers the role of the newspaper in creating identifiable communities, as well as describing the function of the printer-journalist within pioneer communities such as Battleford. Finally, in *Shared Beliefs in a Society: Social*


\(^{48}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 267.

Psychological Analysis,\textsuperscript{51} author Daniel Bar-Tal examines the beliefs held in common within a society, with a particularly relevant section describing the development of “siege mentality”, which he defines as “[the] belief that [a] society is surrounded by a hostile world.”\textsuperscript{52} These works have influenced this analysis of the situation in Battleford by providing a lens through which to view the content of the Saskatchewan Herald from 1878 through to the end of 1885. This study consisted of a careful reading of each issue published during this period, with a particular focus on locating and analyzing articles and editorials concerning First Nations and Indian Department issues.

In the spring of 1885, Battleford was a town with a somewhat uncertain future. Founded in 1874 as Telegraph Flats, and established as the capital of the North-West Territories in October of 1876, the town had started with the highest of ambitions.\textsuperscript{53} By 1882, Battleford was the second-largest community in the North-West Territories, and enjoyed many amenities, including a post office, school, Church of England and Roman Catholic denominations, as well as the impressive Government House.\textsuperscript{54} It was a great blow to the citizens of the Battleford area when, in 1882, the Canadian Pacific Railway chose to reroute the proposed transcontinental railway line to the southern prairies, more than three hundred miles from the community. A second blow followed when citizens learned of the Government of Canada’s decision to move the capital of the North-West Territories to the recently established community of Regina, a move effective as of 27

\textsuperscript{52} Bar-Tal, Shared Beliefs in a Society, 101.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 59.
March 1883.\footnote{55 McPherson, The Battlefords, 74.} Despite these disappointments, the town continued to grow, albeit slowly, throughout the early 1880s.\footnote{56 David McLennan, “Battleford” in The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan [online]. Available: http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/battleford.html}

The physical town was located on both sides of the Battle River, with the “Old Town” (what is now Battleford), set up in the flats on the south side of the river, along with a number of institutional buildings including the Indian Office and the Indian Industrial School (formerly Government House). The “New Town” (which is now the city of North Battleford) was erected on the open prairie on the north side of the river, along with the NWMP’s Fort Battleford (see Illustration 1.2). Fort Battleford was by far the largest structure in the community, consisting of a large stockade surrounding fourteen buildings, including the Commanding Officer’s two story framed cottage.\footnote{57 McPherson, The Battlefords, 79.} In 1885, two hundred men and one hundred and seven horses were stationed at Fort Battleford, making the NWMP an important element of the community.\footnote{58 Hildebrandt, Views from Fort Battleford, 43.}

In the vicinity of Battleford were a number of scattered farms and reserves. Census data shows that in 1885 there was more than ten times the number of First Nations individuals as there were Euro-Canadians in the Battleford district.\footnote{59 P.B. Waite, Canada 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 149.} Not only was there a large First Nations population, but it was distributed in such a way that the town had reserves in all directions. By 1885, the Battleford Indian Agency was comprised of seven reserves: Red Pheasant, Moosomin, Thunderchild, Sweet Grass, Poundmaker, Little Pine and the Stoney (now Salteaux).\footnote{60 “A Protest,” Saskatchewan Herald, 27 February 1885, 2.} All were located within eighty
Illustration 1.2: Battleford N.W.T circa 1885

Adapted from Charles Pelham Mulvany, *The History of the North-West Rebellion of 1885* (A.H. Hovey, 1885).
Illustration 1.3 – The Battleford Indian Agency circa 1885.

kilometers of the town; with the closest being a mere twenty-two kilometers from Battleford (see illustration 1.3).  

It became clear that the Battleford community held great misgivings and fear towards Poundmaker’s Cree and other local First Nations bands with the decision to abandon the town for the perceived safety of the fort on 29 April 1885. A telegram sent from Fort Battleford succinctly describes the local perception of the situation faced by those crowded inside the walls of the stockade on the morning of 30 March 1885: “Men, women and children, in barracks. Armed Indians within three miles, expect engagement probably tonight. Telegraph office moved to barracks.” Later that day, another telegram was sent from Battleford’s Indian Agent James M. Rae to Canada’s Indian Commissioner, Edgar Dewdney: “Indians 300 strong in possession of Indian School and mean war.” Considered together, these two messages demonstrate that those in the fort believed that a group of First Nations individuals, under the leadership of Chiefs Poundmaker and Little Pine, were approaching Battleford with hostile intentions. What is not clear from the telegrams is the evidence used by the members of the settlement to come to this conclusion, and whether this belief was shared universally by those within the fort.

In Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion, Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser convincingly argue that the feelings of terror held by the citizens of Battleford towards Poundmaker’s Cree on that morning was a major overreaction.

Before departing their reserves for the long walk into Battleford, Chiefs Poundmaker and

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62 Light, Footprints in the Dust, 180.
63 Desmond Morton and Reginald Roy, Telegrams of the North-West Campaign (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1972), 46.
Little Pine had sent a messenger ahead to inform their Indian agent, and by extension, the citizens of Battleford, of the nature of their trek. They intended to request tobacco, tea and other rations, as well as to reaffirm their loyalty to the Queen. Unfortunately, this message was not taken at face value by its recipient, Hudson’s Bay Company employee William McKay, and as a result, was not shared within the community. As well as the messenger sent by the chiefs, several other citizens of the Battleford area possessed insight into the mindset of local bands. Thomas Clark, principal of the Battleford Indian Industrial School, had visited several reserves in the week prior to 30 March and had noted that “The Indians appear to be well-disposed toward the white man.” Also, local interpreter Peter Ballendine had been on the Poundmaker reserve when Chief Poundmaker convinced his band that a show of loyalty in Battleford might lead to an increase in rations. There is no evidence provided by Stonechild and Waiser that either Ballendine or Clark shared this information with the citizens of the town.

The lack of hostile intentions of Poundmaker’s Cree towards the settlers is supported by the inclusion of Robert Jefferson, Farm Instructor on Poundmaker’s reserve, who willingly accompanied his charges on the long walk to Battleford. His arrival in town alongside Poundmaker should have reassured those waiting anxiously in the fort. In his memoir, Jefferson describes the scene at Battleford when he arrived: “One solitary individual – the cook – had the temerity to continue in residence at the old government house. He had many visitors that day, gave them food to eat, and they departed without

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64 Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 91.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 90.
67 Ibid., 86.
harming him.” Jefferson goes on to portray the hours of anticipation from the assembled Cree and Assiniboine for a conversation with their Indian agent, and the final breakdown of discipline which saw the impatient First Nations men and women begin to loot the town. Although Jefferson did not condone this looting, he describes it as a minor incident, stating that “next morning not an Indian was to be seen. Hastily grabbing whatever in sight took their fancy they scurried off homeward, pursued in imagination by police through the darkness. It was a regular stampede.” Jefferson’s account corresponds with the official Fort Battleford post journal, which indicates that no property damage or incidents of fire occurred during this first evening. To those assembled in the NWMP fort, however, the looting of the town seems to have confirmed the fears they held towards their First Nations neighbours, and helped to retroactively justify their decision to retreat to Fort Battleford.

Given that the assembled Cree, Assiniboine and Stoney harboured no ill will towards the settlers, and likely would not have engaged in looting had they remained in their homes, it is important to examine the specific perceptions that they had acquired about these groups. The main source of information for Battleford and district residents was their local newspaper, and it played a significant role in the construction of the perception of hostility that led to both the creation and extended duration of the siege. The Saskatchewan Herald, under the editorship of Patrick Gammie (P.G) Laurie, printed its first issue on 25 August 1878. The newspaper started its publishing run as a four page, four-column per page bi-weekly publication, with stories printed in six-point type

68 Jefferson, Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan, 127.
69 Ibid., 128.
70 Stonechild and Waiser, Loyal Till Death, 100.
in order to conserve paper, which was extremely expensive and difficult to obtain.\textsuperscript{72} Despite the fact that he had received training only as a printer, P.G. Laurie took on the additional roles of reporter, journalist, and after 1880, sole owner of the Herald.\textsuperscript{73} Notwithstanding the payroll saved by this jack-of-all-trades, this small newspaper was never a secure financial venture, and as a result Laurie had to be creative in order to make ends meet, serving as an issuer of marriage licences, coroner, agent for both a book company and a garden seed firm, and producer of Aylesbury ducks.\textsuperscript{74} With the single word “Progress” as the newspaper’s motto, the Herald became the first newspaper published west of Winnipeg and was, for a time, the northern-most newspaper printed in all of North America.\textsuperscript{75}

P.G. Laurie (and by extension, the Herald) was generally conservative in is political leanings but, unlike many other period newspapers, was never bound by any particular party loyalties. The Herald placed a great deal of emphasis on local news, filling the front page with local interest tales and upcoming events within Battleford and the surrounding district.\textsuperscript{76} No local news was too insignificant to print, from reports of whether the fish were biting to coverage of the goods received by local stores.\textsuperscript{77} The Herald was written in the easily accessible language of a pioneer newspaper, and was peppered with witty, wry and even outright sarcastic comments from its editor. In its inaugural issue, Laurie stated that the goal of the Herald was to “promote the prosperity and further the march of progress of the whole North-West, by advocating all measures

\textsuperscript{72} Laurie, “The Saskatchewan Herald”, 40.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Laurie, “The Saskatchewan Herald”, 44.
\textsuperscript{76} Carter, “Captured Women”, xxxi.
\textsuperscript{77} Editorial, Saskatchewan Herald, 4 August 1883, 1.
having this for its object, and by making known the vast resources now only awaiting
development.” To this end, Laurie dedicated countless column inches to promoting
settlement in the Battleford district and on extolling the virtues of his little corner of the
West. In his description of the *Herald*, historian Walter Hildebrandt describes Laurie as a
man who “continually attacked eastern newspapers for failing to understand the plight of
those in the West and criticized their sensationalized reports depicting the prairies as a
‘Wild West.’” Despite these criticisms, Laurie would prove to not be averse to using
sensational language within the pages of his newspaper.

An understanding of the general role played by newspapers within late
nineteenth-century Canadian society is important prior to further examination of the
content of the *Herald* and how it influenced the understandings of the citizens of the
Battleford area. With the vast quantity of sources providing information in the present-
day context, it is difficult to imagine getting the majority of one’s news and information
from a single source, but this was precisely the state of affairs in Battleford in the early
1880s. Although the community was served by telegraph as early as 1876, the line
suffered from frequent breakdowns and outages. Likewise, for much of the period prior
to 1885, mail service was slow and inconsistent, an annoyance that was the subject of
frequent editorial complaints published in the *Herald*, as evidenced in 1879: “The total
absence of postal communication with the south renders it impossible to obtain anything
like reliable news; in fact, when a piece of information reaches us, it has passed through

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79 Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford*, 52.
three or four hands (or mouths).”\textsuperscript{81} The importance of the \textit{Herald} within the community of Battleford is acknowledged in \textit{Views from Fort Battleford} which describes P.G. Laurie as having “an important impact on the social and cultural thinking of his day” and that “[his] opinions and views were an important indicator of political and social attitudes of the white settlers in the Battleford region.”\textsuperscript{82} The importance of the \textit{Herald} as an indicator of the attitudes of the Battleford area is also evidenced in James Daschuk’s \textit{Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life},\textsuperscript{83} where the newspaper is used extensively as a source of information on the health status of area First Nations groups.

In his examination of the importance of the printer-journalist in \textit{Imagined Communities}, Benedict Anderson maintains that “the printer’s office emerged as the key to North American communications and community intellectual life.”\textsuperscript{84} As a result, the newspapers created by individuals such as P.G. Laurie not only informed their readers, but also were frequently responsible for initiating conversations and shaping the issues that would be discussed within their particular community. Christophe Lasch makes a similar argument in \textit{The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy}.\textsuperscript{85} Lasch stresses that “the nineteenth-century press created a public forum in which issues were hotly debated. Newspapers not only reported on political controversies but participated in them, drawing in their readers as well.”\textsuperscript{86} In addition to shaping the conversations of

\textsuperscript{81} Editorial, \textit{Saskatchewan Herald}, 19 May 1879, 1.
\textsuperscript{82} Hildebrandt, \textit{Views from Fort Battleford}, 50.
\textsuperscript{84} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, 61.
\textsuperscript{85} Christopher Lasch, \textit{The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy} (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995).
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 164.
their audiences, Anderson further argues that newspapers also played a key role in nineteenth-century community-building, describing that the ritual reading of newspapers by a large number of the citizens of a particular geographic area often “created an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers.” In short, like other newspapers of the era, the Herald did not merely provide information and foster conversations within the region, it likely created and promoted of a sense of the Battleford area as a distinct community.

It is difficult to directly ascertain how many Battleford-area people read the Herald, as circulation figures are not available for the period prior to the North-West Rebellion. As a result, readership can only be inferred from the demographics of the region and what is known about literacy rates in Eastern Canada at the time. Describing the influence of newspapers in Eastern Canada, Susannah Moodie, known for her portrayals of mid-19th century Canadian life and culture, noted that “the Canadian cannot get on without his newspaper any more than an American could without his tobacco.” Although specific to her experiences in Ontario, Moodie’s appraisal of the newspaper habits of Canadians can generally be assumed to be accurate in Battleford, as the majority of its settlers were recent immigrants from that province.

Another fact that lends credence to the acceptance of a relatively widespread newspaper audience is the literacy rate in Canada at the time. Although statistics are not specifically available for the North-West Territories in the 1880s, census data from 1871 determines that just over 90% of Ontario’s adults were literate, a number that would indicate that most of the Euro-

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87 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 62.
89 Ibid.
Canadian adults in Battleford would have been able to read. Based on this information, it seems very likely that the *Herald* was both accessible and read by many within the Battleford area.

From its first issue, the *Herald* dedicated a great deal of column space to First Nations issues, with articles concerning either the local First Nations population or the Indian Department in virtually every issue. Earl Drake, in his article “Pioneer Journalism in Saskatchewan, 1878 – 1887,” attempts to offer an explanation for this fact, stating that “the *Saskatchewan Herald* understandably devoted a larger proportion of space to the aborigines than did other papers, as it was close to a number of large reserves, and in 1884 it had been given a vivid demonstration of Indian behaviour on the warpath.” Although the local First Nations population was many times that of the white population of the Battleford region, Drake’s explanation is somewhat simplistic, and does not account for the fact that even prior to the events of 1885 the *Herald* devoted substantially more column space to First Nations news than other similarly situated newspapers. Evidence of this can be found by comparing the content published by three local newspapers of the North-West Territories in 1883. During that year, the *Herald* published eighty-eight articles concerning First Nations matters, with many of these being at least one half of a column (about eighty lines) in length. In contrast, the *Prince Albert Times and Saskatchewan Review* contained thirty-two such articles, most of them less than eight lines. *The Edmonton Bulletin*, which published just over one hundred

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92 The year 1883 was selected as a comparison point as there were no major localized First Nations issues or events that would skew the results, unlike in 1884 where the thirst dance on Poundmaker’s reserve received a great deal of local attention in Battleford but received little coverage in other newspapers.
articles, numerically exceeded the number of articles in the *Herald*, but as the former published twice as many issues in 1883 (fifty-two to the *Herald*’s twenty-six), the reporting of First Nations matters made up a lower percentage of the total newspaper content. These statistics are relevant as each of the three towns in question were similar in ethnic background, relative isolation and in the proximity of reserves, yet Battleford’s *Herald* devoted a proportionally larger amount of ink to First Nations issues than the other publications. By inspecting both the number and length of articles relating to First Nations issues, it becomes clear that the reporting of these issues was a priority to Laurie. What is less clear is whether this importance resulted from the demand of the community or for more personal reasons.

By and large, Laurie walked a fine line within the pages of the *Herald*. As has been previously discussed, Laurie was committed to portraying the Battleford district as a highly desirable setting for immigration. On the other hand, his personal belief system and experiences left him with a unique interpretation of his First Nations neighbours. Walter Hildebrandt, in his *View from Fort Battleford*, argues that as a result of his Ontario Anglican upbringing Laurie “saw a strict but natural social structure in which the most civilized persons occupied the upper classes”. This, in turn, led to a natural disdain for what Laurie considered to be the “lesser breeds” that had been the original inhabitants of the area. Hildebrandt further argues that Laurie would have viewed himself as a member of the governing elite. This belief structure led to a paradox within his publication. In general terms, he assured his readership that the local First Nations people were settling down to life on the reserves and that this process would certainly

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93 Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford*, 53.
94 Ibid.
continue in an orderly and satisfactory manner. However, this message was in sharp contrast to the frequent portrayal within the pages of the Herald depicting First Nations individuals (including a number of prominent chiefs) as lazy, naïve, uneducated, drunk, generally violent and impulsive. These conflicting views are sustained throughout the issues of the Herald published prior to the North-West Rebellion.

This paradox was not unique to Laurie. In Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West, David M. Wrobel discusses the fine line many pioneer editors walked in promoting their communities while still adhering to the contemporary stereotypes of First Nations individuals, a situation present on both sides of the border:

[One editor’s] treatment of California’s Indian tribes was equally mired in contradictions. He provided a thoroughly uncharitable discussion of his perceptions of the ugliness of Indian women, describing them as “broad-faced, flat-nosed, small-eyed, unkempt, frowzy, undersized, thickset, clumsy”; but he then generated considerable sympathy for California Indians in the course of providing a scathing indictment of the federal policy of placing peaceful people on reservations.

Although Laurie’s struggles in balancing the promotion of his community and his world view, which asserted that member of local First Nations were inferior, were not unique, they are an important consideration when examining the content and messaging of the Herald.

From its first issue in August of 1878, a number of themes can be found in the portrayal of First Nations individuals within the pages of the Herald, many of which correspond to the traditionally-held stereotypes that Anderson and Robertson found in

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96 Ibid., 167.
 Seeing Red. One example of stereotypical treatment can be found in the frequent portrayal of the Battleford-area district First Nations individuals and groups as lazy. At least eighteen articles explicitly expressing this belief were published between January of 1879 and September of 1884, including an August 1881 editorial which suggested that “The Indians about here are in a bad way. They had a couple of weeks’ holiday on the occasion of their ‘thirst dance;’ then they announced their intention of waiting in town for their payments ... Meanwhile their crops go untended and the haying season is allowed to pass without a ton being cut.” An article in the 4 August 1883 issue laments that “the Indian is nothing if not a nuisance. The shifts an able-bodied one can make to get out of work would shame his Jeremy Diddler brethren of a higher civilization.” In the same issue, Laurie editorializes on a recent spate of ransacked gardens, stating that, “It appears to be chiefly women and children who are concerned in these predatory raids, the bucks probably being too lazy to steal anything they would have to carry.” Despite being aware of the troubles that were being experienced in setting up First Nations agricultural operations, and knowing that the Government rations policy was insufficient and had led to starvation conditions and disease outbreaks on local reserves, Laurie persisted in this stereotypical characterization.

Another common characteristic attributed to First Nations individuals of the North-West Territories in the columns of the Herald was that of ignorance and uncivilized behaviour. An early example of this characterisation can be found on the

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97 Editorial, Saskatchewan Herald, 1 August 1881, 1. See also Saskatchewan Herald issues: 27 January 1879, 16 June 1879, 22 September 1879, 9 February 1880, 2 August 1880, 20 June 1881, 4 July 1881, 27 May 1882, 10 June 1882, 22 July 1882, 12 December 1882, 20 Jan 1883, 1 September 1883, and 20 September 1884.
98 “Repatriated Pets,” Saskatchewan Herald, 4 August 1883, 1.
99 Editorial, Saskatchewan Herald, 4 August 1883, 2.
100 Daschuk, Clearing the Plains, 151.
front page of an 1879 edition where Laurie stated that “the Herald office is the chief centre of attraction for our aboriginal visitors. They say, ‘Wah! Wah!!’”101 The tone of Laurie’s writing in respect to First Nations people was often glib, crude, or downright sarcastic. Although speaking of the twentieth-century, in Native Americans in the News, Mary Ann Weston asserts that tone and vocabulary can be equivalent in importance to the content of an article, explaining that “whether it was casting stories in a bemused, slightly humorous tone that implied nothing concerning local First Nations groups was to be taken seriously, or using overtly stereotypical language, the words used contributed powerfully to the images of Native Americans…”102 Many articles printed in the Herald used a combination of humour and sarcasm when relating to First Nations issues as evidenced by the following articles, published in July 1881 and May 1882 respectively:

The natives of this land are fully up to the buzzards of the South. Few deceased animals escape their rapacious maws. A horse died a few nights ago on the street opposite our office, and at early dawn we beheld a posse of native beauties cutting the dead animal up a la buffalo mode of past days, and conveying it to camp, where a grand gorge was being prepared. We did not attend that pow wow.103

Kwo-kwo-ke-chis belongs to Moo-soo-min’s band. He is not a good Indian. In fact, he is the reverse. Decidedly so. … He got two months at hard labour and his hair cut. He didn’t like the hairdressing part. He resisted, but that didn’t work. Then he wept. He declared his willingness to fight two Blackfeet as an alternative. It was no use, however, as there were no Blackfeet handy. And his hair was cut.104

101 Editorial, Saskatchewan Herald, 19 May 1879, 1.
102 Weston, Native Americans in the News, 13.
103 Editorial, Saskatchewan Herald, 4 July 1881, 1.
104 Editorial, Saskatchewan Herald, 27 May 1882, 1. More examples of this use of tone to denote ignorance or primitive behaviour can be found in the Saskatchewan Herald issues of 10 February 1879, 10 March 1879, 2 June 1879, 17 November 1879, 26 April 1880, 2 August 1880, 25 April 1881, 4 July 1881, 21 January 1882, 15 April 1882, 13 May 1882, 9 December 1882, 31 March 1883, 21 July 1883, 14 August 1883, 19 April 1884, 31 May 1884, 14 October 1884, 12 December 1884 and 6 March 1885.
The portrayal of local First Nations as violent and potentially dangerous was also common throughout the issues of the *Herald*. In the 10 February 1879 issue, Laurie states that “The well-being of the Indians, the peace of the country, and the safety of the settlers within reach of the plains, all call on the Government for a prompt and earnest consideration of the question [setting up local Indian departments] under consideration.” An April 1883 article described that “a feeling of utter disregard is fast taking root amongst the several bands – a disregard of the present, or the future – a feeling which if not removed by a prompt and vigorous policy, will doubtless be productive of serious evil.” Although both of these articles were written to urge government action on First Nations issues, they give the consequences of a failure to act as being inevitable First Nations violence, reinforcing the stereotype that without careful handling, violence was always a distinct possibility. This belief is repeated in the *Herald* on at least fourteen other occasions prior to the end of 1884.

As well, crimes committed by First Nations people, such as horse thievery and murders were frequently reported within the pages of the *Herald*. These stories were so frequent that it became noteworthy when a crime did not involve an Indigenous person, as was the case on 13 October 1883, when a rash of horse thefts were occurring near Maple Creek: “The extent of these thefts suggests the existence of an organized band of thieves working together at different places and exchanging the booty amongst themselves. *Indians are not blamed in this instance* [emphasis added].”

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107 See also *Saskatchewan Herald* issues: 18 November 1878, 30 June 1879, 8 September 1879, 5 July 1880, 19 July 1880, 28 February 1881, 11 April 1881, 24 June 1882, 23 September 1882, 17 February 1883, 7 June 1883, 22 March 1884, 5 April 1884, and 4 October 1884.
involving First Nations individuals from as far away as Calgary were considered important enough to print. An example of this can be found on 12 July 1884, where it is reported that “The Calgary Herald complains that the farmers south of that town are losing a great many cattle, principally [sic] calves, by depredations of the Indians. The Indians go in parties of five or six, who think that as only the one who kills the animal is amenable to the law it will not be so easy to convict them.”

Through an examination of the *Herald* from 1878 – 1885, it is noteworthy that local crimes were covered no matter the ethnicity of the perpetrator and victim, but crimes further afield only demanded attention if they included at least one First Nations person.

Even when there was no occasion to comment on the danger posed by the First Nations groups in the Battleford district, the *Herald* had a pattern of portraying the local bands as a nuisance, as evidenced in the first line of the opening issue of 1883, which states that “the number of Indians who annoyed the townspeople by making calls on New Year’s Day was much smaller than usual. No one felt hurt at the neglect [emphasis added]”

Another example of this attitude can be found in the month leading up to the onset of the siege, when Laurie proclaims that “we don’t want to interfere with what little happiness falls to the share of the Indian, but it would be a blessing to the public if he could be compelled to desist from beating the tom-tom all through the night.”

It is important to note that the stereotypical portrayal of Canada’s First Nations population as lazy, ignorant, uncivilized, potentially violent and generally a nuisance was not unique to the Battleford area. The use of broad stereotypes in the media treatment of

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non-dominant cultural groups was a common characteristic of North American newspapers of the nineteenth century and beyond, as explained in the works of Anderson and Robertson, Gitlin, and Weston. Accepting that these generalizations were common in Canadian newspapers, it is clear that stereotypes alone cannot adequately explain the unique actions of the Battleford residents in the early days of the North-West Rebellion. As a result, a closer look at the Herald’s treatment of chiefs Poundmaker and Big Bear will help to explain the climate of fear that led to the unique behaviour of the citizens of Battleford during March and April of 1885.

By the early-1880s, Chief Poundmaker had emerged as one of the most prominent and recognizable Cree chiefs in the Battleford area. He was well known for his abilities as a negotiator and orator, and attracted a great deal of respect due to his connection to prominent Blackfoot chief Crowfoot.\textsuperscript{112} As a leading chief in the Battleford area, Poundmaker was a frequent subject of coverage in the Herald. The first reference to him found within the pages of the newspaper, in the summer of 1880, was decidedly negative:

> The Poundmaker and Strike-him-on-the-Back with their followers came in to meet them [the Assiniboines of Mosquito’s band] and have a council. The result of this was a demand for an extravagant amount of provisions, coupled with the suggestion that if it was not forthcoming they might be under the necessity of taking it.\textsuperscript{113}

Poundmaker’s attitude towards rations was evidently a bone of contention for Laurie, as several months later he published the following:

> The Poundmaker said if extra provisions were not given he would kill a Government ox as soon as he got home, and added that there were not police enough here to arrest him for it. For a long time past he has been

\textsuperscript{112} Jefferson, Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan, 103.
\textsuperscript{113} Editorial, Saskatchewan Herald, 5 July 1880, 1.
threatening secession on the ground that faith is not being kept and insists on a change being made in some of the details of the treaty.\textsuperscript{114}

Although initially rather disapproving, the view held by P.G. Laurie towards Chief Poundmaker softened over time, as Poundmaker and his band attempted to transition to a farming lifestyle. This change of heart can be seen in a number of articles praising the chief which first emerged in the fall of 1882:

When Chief Poundmaker went south in the spring of 1881, one of his headmen killed a Government calf, for which orders were issued that he should be fined ten dollars this year at payment time. When the money was deducted from his annuity he commenced to complain, but was promptly stopped by Chief Poundmaker, who made up the amount out of his own money. He says he wants no jangling between his band and the authorities…\textsuperscript{115}

And again, in June of 1883:

\textquote{[Poundmaker] is the only chief around here who has displayed any energy in his operations, or who conducts himself with dignity, and it would have a bad effect on the other bands of the district, if, from any fault not his own, he should be made to forfeit his high position as the most industrious, best behaved, and independent chief in this district.}\textsuperscript{116}

As long as Poundmaker continued to work within the confines of his reserve and did not criticize the administration of Indian affairs, the \textit{Herald} had nothing but praise for the chief. This tone changed quickly, however, in the fall of 1883, when Poundmaker began to vocally raise concerns about the lack of agricultural support given to First Nations bands in the North-West. The shift in coverage began with a sarcastic characterization of the chief in the 18 August 1883 issue of the \textit{Herald}, which stated that “Poundmaker is back from his tour in the south. He is so set up by the attentions paid to him that he is not quite sure whether he is the Commissioner or a common Indian. He

\textsuperscript{114} Untitled, \textit{Saskatchewan Herald}, 28 February 1881, 2.
\textsuperscript{115} Editorial, \textit{Saskatchewan Herald}, 14 October 1882, 1.
\textsuperscript{116} Editorial, \textit{Saskatchewan Herald}, 9 June 1883, 2.
has discarded pants and donned his blanket [emphasis added].”

A negative characterization of Poundmaker continued into the spring with the February 1884 statement that

There is a good deal of travel and communication between Poundmaker and other bands of Indians, having for its object concerted action in forcing the Government to carry out its alleged promises, which according to Indian ideas, is free grub and plenty of it. Poundmaker has been troublesome ever since his visit to the south last spring…

As 1884 wore on, this uncomplimentary treatment of Poundmaker within the pages of the Herald continued, as the chief’s name became synonymous as the antithesis of a good leader. An article in the spring of 1884 stated that “If [Cree chief Moosomin’s] prosperity does not puff him up, as it did Poundmaker, he should be able to sustain himself and band at once, and soon become wealthy [emphasis added].” Soon after this editorial was published, Poundmaker’s name began to be frequently linked with that of Big Bear, a chief considered by many as a troublesome malcontent.

A leading chief among the hunting bands of the northern Plains Cree, Big Bear gained notoriety for his refusal to sign Treaty Six on its negotiation in 1876. Big Bear acquired the reputation as a troublemaker as the result of a complicated combination of factors which included mistranslations, his refusal to take treaty and his constant struggle for better terms for his people. From 1879 onwards, Big Bear’s movements were a

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117 Editorial, Saskatchewan Herald, 18 August 1883, 1.
118 Untitled, Saskatchewan Herald, 24 February 1884, 2.
119 Editorial, Saskatchewan Herald, 8 March 1884, 1.
120 Stonechild and Waiser, Loyal till Death, 25.
121 Big Bear was described as, for example, “one of the most troublesome Cree Indians we have in the territories” by NWMP officer James Walker, speaking to Lieutenant-Governor David Laird in 1879. Hugh Dempsey, Big Bear: The End of Freedom (Vancouver : Douglas & McIntyre, 1984), 83. The word “troublesome” was also used by Edgar Dewdney in 1881. See Stonechild and Waiser, Loyal till Death and Dempsey, Big Bear: The End of Freedom for more information about the Treaty Six negotiations and the mistranslation issue.
regular feature in the *Herald*, both because he was camped near the notorious Sioux chief Sitting Bull, and because “his lodge served as a rallying point for the disaffected and those who would not settle down.”122

The portrayal of Big Bear as a firebrand persisted even after he finally adhered to Treaty Six in 1882. “Big Bear Rampant” read the headline of the 15 September 1883 *Herald*, under which it was written that “Big Bear has induced all the Indians on the reserves near [Fort] Pitt to gather at that place and join him in a demand that they shall be fed without being required to work. Big Bear refuses to go on to his reserve and the crops on the old reserves are being neglected.”123 The image of Big Bear as a stubborn freeloader is reinforced the following spring, when the *Herald* reports that “J.M. Rae, Indian Agent, has gone to Pitt to look after the interests of his wards there and to make an effort to show Big Bear that he is only a common Indian and not the head resident officer of the Department in this district [emphasis added].”124

Although he had signed Treaty Six, Big Bear delayed in his selection of a reserve in a further attempt at negotiating better terms for his people. This stubbornness was alternately treated with disapproval and amusement in the pages of the *Herald*. An August 1884 column noted that “Big Bear has deliberately made himself out a fraud and a liar, by still further deferring settlement on his reserve, notwithstanding his recent solemn promises”125 while another article wrote:

Big Bear has come to the conclusion that there is something wrong in the management of Indian affairs. He has seen and conversed with many of the chief officers of the Department, but none of them seems to be ‘the

122 “Big Bear”, *Saskatchewan Herald*, 3 February 1883, 2.
123 “Big Bear Rampant”, *Saskatchewan Herald*, 15 September 1883, 3.
head’ – there is always some one higher. To settle who this higher power is has now become the one object of his life. To this end he has made up his mind to go to Ottawa, calling at Regina on the way. If there is a head to the Department he is bound to find him, for he will deal with no one else. If the old growler gets down to Ontario it is to be hoped he will be kept there [emphasis added].

This frequent newspaper coverage created a specific impression of the two Cree chiefs. Poundmaker and Big Bear were transformed from strong advocates for the advancement of issues important to their people into cantankerous, disobedient slackers. This portrayal of Poundmaker and Big Bear by the Herald also affected their status within the Euro-Canadian population of Battleford. In the essay “Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action”, authors Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton maintain that one of the most important roles of mass media is that of status conferral, explaining that:

> The mass media confer status on public issues, persons, organizations, and social movements. Common experience as well as research testifies that the social standing of persons or social policies is raised when these command favorable attention in the mass media [emphasis in original].

Inversely, the predominately negative portrayal of Chiefs Poundmaker and Big Bear in the Herald contributed to a lowering of the social status of these two leaders in the eyes of the wider Battleford community. This lowered social status allowed the Herald and as a result, its readers to ignore the protests of these two men and the people that they represented. Instead of recognizing the legitimate grievances and the desperate position that many of the First Nations groups in the Battleford area were faced with, the Herald downplayed the issues as only the grumbles of habitual complainers. As a result, when

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126 Editorial, Saskatchewan Herald, 8 March 1884, 1.
the chiefs attempted to take concrete actions to remedy their legitimate grievances, they were viewed with mistrust and even fear, as evidenced in the *Herald* coverage of the events that took place on Poundmaker’s reserve during a thirst dance gathering in June 1884.

By the beginning of 1884, many First Nations bands were in dire straits. Throughout the North-West Territories, reserve farms were still not adequate to support the First Nations bands that now depended on them. This was due to a number of factors including the lack of effective instruction and insufficient tools.\(^\text{128}\) Added to this, government cutbacks to the rations provided to those on reserves meant that many First Nations people in the North-West Territories were facing destitution and even starvation.\(^\text{129}\) Many chiefs were frustrated with the lack of responsiveness from government officials and desperate for food to feed their starving communities. In many cases, food was available in government storehouses on the reserves, but as a result of government policy was often withheld and left to spoil.\(^\text{130}\) As a result, the issue of rations became a contentious one on many reserves in the early months of 1884. On 18 February, for example, a request for increased rations led to a stand-off on the Yellow Calf reserve in the Qu’Appelle District of the North-West Territories.\(^\text{131}\) The NWMP were brought in and the matter was eventually settled as the result of negotiation. This incident was duly reported in the *Herald*, with a note that it was the wisdom of the


\(^{130}\) Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*, 132.

\(^{131}\) Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 121.
NWMP in not engaging in a fight on Yellow Calf that led to the successful outcome.\footnote{132 Untitled, Saskatchewan Herald, 22 March 1884, 1.}

Several weeks later, the \textit{Herald} reported that the story had taken a local twist:

Rumors of an intention of some of Poundmaker’s men to bring about an increase of the rations allowed them by robbing the warehouse on the reserve of provisions having reached the authorities [in Battleford], a detachment of police was sent [to Poundmaker’s reserve] on Monday to prevent the outrage. The Indians here had early and specific information of all that took place in the Qu’Appelle District during the recent trouble there, and think that the formal appearance before a magistrate will be an easy way of procuring a large increase in the regular issue of rations.\footnote{133 Editorial, Saskatchewan Herald, 19 April 1884, 1.}

Although no crimes were committed on Poundmaker’s reserve or, for that matter, anywhere else in the Battleford region that spring, the newspaper report reinforced the belief among the citizens of Battleford that the potential for bad behaviour was ever-present on Poundmaker’s reserve. This belief was soon strengthened by the \textit{Herald}.

For several months, Poundmaker and Big Bear had been planning a thirst dance to take place in the late spring of 1884. The thirst dance, a traditional ceremony which represented cooperation and renewal, would provide an opportunity for a meeting of local chiefs to discuss actions that could be taken to improve the living conditions on their reserves.\footnote{134 Stonechild and Waiser, \textit{Loyal till Death}, 56.} As a result, a large number of First Nations individuals began to gather for the ceremony beginning on 14 June 1884, resulting in a feeling of uneasiness among many Battleford-area residents.\footnote{135 Light, \textit{Footprints in the Dust}, 88.}

It was on 18 June 1884, during the lead-up to the actual thirst dance that Kāwēchetwēmot (Kahweechetwaymot), a Cree from Big Bear’s band, assaulted Farm Instructor John Craig over the refusal of food, an incident that was exacerbated by the
fact that the former spoke no English and Craig spoke no Cree.\textsuperscript{136} In a brief scuffle, Craig was struck with an axe handle by the angered Kahweechetwaymot (but was not seriously injured) and eventually supplied the provisions that had been requested.\textsuperscript{137} Immediately after Kahweechetwaymot’s departure, Craig then rushed to Fort Battleford and demanded that his assaulter be arrested. When the initial officer who was sent failed to apprehend the suspect, a larger force of twenty-five men was dispatched to the scene of the crime.\textsuperscript{138}

Determined to arrest Kahweechetwaymot, the police, led by Superintendent Crozier, went so far as to enter the tent where the thirst dance was being held, a move that was considered by the participants of the ceremony to be an outright insult.\textsuperscript{139} Regrettably for the NWMP, they were again unable to make a successful arrest, mostly due to the fact that the participants all had painted faces and were wearing regalia. Finally, at the conclusion of the thirst dance ceremony, Crozier walked into a group of excited young warriors (who were still reeling from the earlier insult) and arrested the suspect, but not before a great deal of posturing and bluster had transpired between the two sides.\textsuperscript{140} In \textit{Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan}, Robert Jefferson recalls the scene:

It would be impossible to describe the excitement that prevailed during all this time – it was not more than half an hour from start to finish, but it seemed ages – the tension; the shouts of incitement of the young bloods… Events were on a hair trigger for a while: - yet, nothing happened.\textsuperscript{141}

\begin{footnotes}
\item [136] Kahweechetwaymot is an Anglicized spelling of the Cree name, but it will be adopted within this paper to maintain consistency with the source documents.
\item [137] Stonechild and Waiser, \textit{Loyal till Death}, 56.
\item [139] Stonechild and Waiser, \textit{Loyal till Death}, 56.
\item [140] Hildebrandt, \textit{Views from Fort Battleford}, 47.
\item [141] Jefferson, \textit{Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan}, 113.
\end{footnotes}
Despite the fact that not a single shot was fired, nor was anyone (save Farm Instructor Craig) injured, the incident at the thirst dance was considered by P.G. Laurie to be of such importance that a special issue of the *Herald* was quickly printed. In the edition, two entire pages were dedicated to the event, which was given sensational treatment in its coverage. Laurie editorialized that “an outbreak, fraught with untold horrors, [was] only avoided by a miracle,” and that “it was nothing short of a miracle that prevented bloodshed, for had a rifle or a revolver gone off accidentally in the scuffle, there is no telling what might have been the result, as firing would have undoubtedly become general, and war to the knife have been declared.”\(^{142}\) Although Chiefs Poundmaker and Big Bear had acted calmly and helped to keep peace among the agitated men, all of the credit for the peaceful outcome was given to the NWMP:

> The thanks of the community are undoubtedly due to Major Crozier for the successful manner in which bloodshed was averted; for had but one shot been fired human mind could not foresee what would have been the result. The courage and coolness of this officer in going amongst the Indians unarmed and alone is deserving of the greatest praise…\(^{143}\)

Interestingly, despite the fact that the thirst dance took place nearly eighty kilometers away from Battleford and the community had not been threatened directly or even peripherally, Laurie reports that a number of the residents of the town and surrounding area chose to remove themselves to the perceived safety of Fort Battleford immediately upon the departure of the local detachment of the NWMP to Poundmaker’s reserve: “The offer of quarters in the barracks to any who might wish to avail themselves of the greater security they offered in case of attack was taken advantage of by several

\(^{142}\) “The Indian Trouble,” *Saskatchewan Herald*, 25 June 1884, 1.

\(^{143}\) Ibid.
families from the country as well as from the town.”¹⁴⁴ This indicates that at least some of the people of Battleford felt that they were in some degree of danger from the First Nations groups assembled in the area.

Robert Jefferson, in the weeks that followed the incident at the thirst dance, recounted in his memoir that a number of wild rumours that circulated around the town and surrounding area, stating that the settlers believed that members of the local First Nations “were killing cattle; they were prowling round the adjacent country, scaring the settler; and so on. [Local residents] were terribly frightened.”¹⁴⁵ It wasn’t until 27 July that Kahweechetwaymot received a trial and was sentenced to a week in jail. This sentence was regarded with general annoyance by the citizens of Battleford, who had hoped that a more severe sentence would serve as a lesson to others who may be inclined to also cause problems.¹⁴⁶ By mid-summer 1884, the rumours had died down, order prevailed on Poundmaker’s reserve and there were no additional incidents in the aftermath of the thirst dance.

The arrival of Louis Riel in the Saskatchewan district in the spring of 1884, upon request from the Métis community, provided a great deal of conversation in the Battleford region.¹⁴⁷ Initially, Laurie connected the return of Riel with the possibility of First Nations violence:

We do not believe these rumors will lead to anything. The people are under no disabilities that cannot be redressed by constitutional means. To incite the Indians to acts of violence for purposes of revenge for real or

¹⁴⁵ Campbell Innes, Cree Rebellion of 1884, (Battleford: Battleford Historical Society, 1926), 34.
¹⁴⁶ Light, Footprints in the Dust, 102.
¹⁴⁷ “My Dear Riel”, Saskatchewan Herald, 12 July 1884, 2.
fancied wrongs, is a thing that will not be permitted by the Government or the settlers.\textsuperscript{148}

As 1884 closed and Riel remained in Canada, neither Big Bear nor Poundmaker was ever reported to be sympathetic to the Métis leader. A September 1884 article describes a meeting between Big Bear and Riel: “Big Bear arrived here on the 26\textsuperscript{th} from his visit to the imported saviour of his country at Duck Lake. The old man does not seem to have been favorably impressed with the prospects held out to him there.”\textsuperscript{149}

Despite a lack of further violence or any connection with the looming Métis unrest, a government decision in the weeks immediately preceding the outbreak of the Rebellion would further contribute to the general feeling of unease about Chief Poundmaker. In the 27 February 1885 issue of the \textit{Herald}, Laurie expressed outrage at the possibility of the Indian agency, storehouse and other Indian Department buildings being moved to Poundmaker’s reserve, stating that “it is well and finally decided that the PATRIOTIC Poundmaker will have all these public buildings at his own door, as a reward for his rebellion last summer [emphasis in original]”.\textsuperscript{150} After arguing that Battleford was geographically the most logical location for these offices (and would benefit from the business), Laurie goes on to state that:

\begin{quote}
Situated, as the storehouse will be, forty miles from the nearest detachment of police, it places a large amount of Government property… completely at the mercy of the Indians… They could carry out their designs and be scattered throughout the prairies with their booty long before aid could be summoned.\textsuperscript{151}
\end{quote}

In evoking the memory of the Thirst Dance incident and reinforcing the perceived dishonesty and potential for violence constantly lurking on Poundmaker’s reserve, Laurie

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{148} “My Dear Riel”, \textit{Saskatchewan Herald}, 12 July 1884, 2.
\textsuperscript{149} Editorial, \textit{Saskatchewan Herald}, 6 September 1884, 1.
\textsuperscript{150} “A Protest”, \textit{Saskatchewan Herald}, 27 February 1885, 1.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
argues a general danger of First Nations assemblies, stating that “an Indian is not without a certain modicum of reason, and they would perceive as readily as could their white brethren the truth of the proverb, ‘In union is strength’.” Slightly more than a month prior to the onset of the Siege of Battleford, this editorial in the *Herald* again illustrated a distrust of the First Nations residents of the area and reiterated the theme that potential danger was a likely result of chiefs gathering together with a common purpose.

Instead of simply using his newspaper as a soapbox, Laurie also convened a meeting of the citizens of Battleford on the issue. The meeting, attended by more than sixty of Battleford’s citizens, drew up a petition to be sent to Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, which utilized the wording of the editorial almost verbatim in asking for the Indian Department buildings to remain in Battleford. As a result of the combination of the editorial and subsequent town meeting, nearly all of the citizens of Battleford would have been exposed to Laurie’s opinion of Poundmaker in the month leading up to the Siege. This is the same issue in which Laurie reinforces the image of individual First Nations members as uncivilized, expressing his annoyance of the noise made by their “tom toms”.

In the days following the public outcry over the potential relocation of the Indian Department buildings and heightened fears of Poundmaker, new events would dominate the discussion within Battleford. The motives and possible actions of Louis Riel and his Métis followers at Batoche had been speculated upon in the *Herald* since the Métis leader had arrived in the North-West Territories the previous summer. Despite being a near-

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152 “A Protest”, *Saskatchewan Herald*, 27 February 1885, 1.
repeat of the well-known events that occurred in Red River in 1869, the taking of hostages by the Métis on 18 March, followed shortly by the declaration of a provisional government, shocked the citizens of the Battleford area. In the 20 March issue of the *Herald*, Laurie describes the situation, stating that “for some days after [members of the Battleford] detachment of mounted police left for Carleton last week there was some anxiety felt as to what was about to happen, and this became more marked on Monday…”

Published only nine days prior to the beginning of the Siege of Battleford, Laurie once again raises the potential of First Nations unrest, by saying that “if there should any trouble [sic] arise amongst the settled Indians it will be largely due to the dissatisfaction caused by seeing others being fed although they have refused to work.”

Although this was not particularly inflammatory, it did serve to remind Laurie’s readers that the spectre of First Nations violence was ever-present, specifically in cases of unfairness.

The Battle of Duck Lake, which occurred between the Métis and nearly one hundred NWMP members and volunteers from the Prince Albert area on 26 March, increased the level of tension within the Battleford area. The 27 March edition of the *Herald*, which was to be the last published until the end of the siege, contained almost two full pages of content published under the headline “Riel and his Work”. As many of the telegraph lines in the Batoche, Prince Albert and Fort Carleton area had been cut, the number of wild rumours swirling around the North-West Territories increased dramatically. A list of casualties from the Battle of Duck Lake was included in this edition, but no further information on the battle itself was available at press time, and in

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156 “From Carleton,” *Saskatchewan Herald*, 20 March 1885, 2.
examining this issue it is apparent that the Duck Lake information was added at the last minute, as no editorial appears. The *Herald*’s unnamed correspondent from Fort Carleton reported that “Mr. Scott, the mail stationmaster at Duck Lake, brings word that there is a story afloat that the Sioux have attacked and taken Saskatoon,” even when other reports indicated that White Cap and his Sioux were safely on reserve.\(^{157}\)

These rumours led to a great deal of discussion within the town of Battleford, and the *Herald* noted that:

> The threatened disturbance at the South Branch [of the Saskatchewan River, near Batoche] drew attention to the fact that while there were arms, accoutrements and ammunition in abundance, Battleford had no local military organization with which to assist the mounted police or defend themselves in an emergency.\(^ {158}\)

As a result of both the Métis conflict and rumours of further violence, a committee within the town created a local militia, to protect the settlement. Despite the creation of the militia, Laurie describes the general mood in Battleford as calm, stating that: “We merely say, that with the exception of the natural anxiety as to how the absent ones are getting along everything is quiet. As far as our Indians are concerned there is scarcely a ripple of excitement amongst them.”\(^ {159}\) This statement belies Laurie’s struggle between his mission to promote Battleford as a desirable location for settlement and his tendency to view the local First Nations population as potentially dangerous. On one hand, he reports that the people of Battleford are getting ready to defend themselves, despite the fact that they are not near enough to the Métis position to be in any danger. On the other hand, he insists that everything is calm in the area. It is unclear when the mood turned from

\(^{157}\) “Riel and his Work,” *Saskatchewan Herald*, 27 March 1885, 1.
\(^{158}\) Ibid.
\(^{159}\) “At Home”, *Saskatchewan Herald*, 27 March 1885, 2.
unease to terror within the Battleford area, but the timeline can be partially reconstructed through the coordinated examination of a number of sources. There is evidence that rumours of First Nations violence were already circling within the community at the time of the distribution of the 27 March issue of the Herald, as written in Views from Fort Battleford:

The townspeople expected some trouble from the Native population through rumours heard from a number of Native women of surrounding reserves. The women reported that large groups of Natives were gathering and the whites feared this could mean violence. Rumour became more concrete with the events at Duck Lake. The effect of this fight reinforced the fear that an uprising was impending.\(^{160}\)

An examination of Fort Battleford’s post diary, kept by the officers of the NWMP detachment, shows no indication that trouble was expected by the NWMP prior to the Battle of Duck Lake. This lack of concern seems to also have been reflected by the individual members of the NWMP, as pointed out by Walter Hildebrandt who states that “prior to March 1885, the recorded events in the diaries of the men focussed on the mundane.”\(^{161}\) Upon receiving the news of the fight at Duck Lake on 26 March, however, the large force at Battleford was reduced to only a “skeleton defense” as the majority of the local police force, led by Superintendent Crozier, left for Carleton to deal with the fallout from the battle.\(^{162}\) This highly-visible departure of much of the local NWMP detachment could be expected to have caused a feeling of vulnerability within the town, whose citizens had been regularly reminded by the Herald of the potential for trouble with local First Nations bands, and indeed, this seems to be the case. Local merchant James Clinkskill complained that “no definite information could be got from those in

\(^{160}\) Hildebrandt, Views from Fort Battleford, 67.
\(^{161}\) Ibid., 65.
\(^{162}\) McPherson, The Battlefords, 83.
authority as to what was transpiring, nor would they give us any advice as to what we should do in the event of the little town being attacked,” indicating that the town had already believed that there was the possibility of some kind of violence.\footnote{Beal and Macleod, }{Prairie Fire}, 181.

The rumours that Poundmaker, leading a large group of men and women, was headed for town directly incited this panicked escape to Fort Battleford. Although there were numerous signs that should have reassured the citizens of the Battleford area that the assembled people had peaceful intentions, fear ruled the day. This fear had been nurtured by the long history of negativity and fear within the pages of the \textit{Herald}. Although the issues published in March 1885 did not directly state that First Nations violence was looming, the earlier and extensive history of negative articles and editorials made it difficult for the citizens of the Battleford region to believe that they were safe. David M. Wrobel explains the power of belief in a group in \textit{Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West}, stating that “while [a group’s beliefs] may at times seem to be constructed upon a flimsy foundation of myth and misunderstanding, is deeply meaningful to its possessor/s and continues to influence action. When myth is acted upon, it ends up becoming a very real and tangible force.”\footnote{Wrobel, }{Promised Lands}, 197

In the case of Battleford, the perception of underlying First Nations violence combined with extensive negative coverage towards Chiefs Big Bear and Poundmaker, and the sensationalized description of the June 1884 Thirst Dance as a narrowly averted slaughter, certainly contributed significantly to the fear that prompted the abandonment of Battleford-area homes and businesses.

\footnote{163}{Beal and Macleod, \textit{Prairie Fire}, 181.} \footnote{164}{Wrobel, \textit{Promised Lands}, 197}
A meeting of a number of the citizens of Battleford on 28 March led to a plan to fortify the stately home of Judge Charles Rouleau against First Nations attack, but the news that Poundmaker was on the move led the group to flee instead to the NWMP garrison. The movement to Fort Battleford was anything but orderly, as Clinkskill described:

Gathering some clothing, etc. together we hastily took a meal and prepared to take refuge in the Police barracks… I only had a little pony my wife used to drive and a buckboard. … I was unable to take any of our trunks which had been packed. My wife carried her jewel case and an old family bible, an heirloom, in her hands, the clothing on our backs was all we could take.

Over the next number of days five hundred and twelve people, including about three hundred women and children sought shelter within the walls of Fort Battleford’s stockade. Some Battleford citizens felt that even the walls of the NWMP fort did not provide enough security, leading a number of prominent residents to flee for Swift Current on 29 March. The only person in the town of Battleford who did not take cover in the fort was Arthur Dobbs, who was employed as the cook at the Indian school.

The arrival of the group of around one hundred Cree led by Poundmaker on the morning of 30 March 1885 seemed to justify the fears of the terrified citizens in the Fort. One Battleford resident sensationally expressed the scale of the assemblage of Cree in a wire to the Manitoba Free Press saying that “the hills are black with

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165 Beal and Macleod, *Prairie Fire*, 179.
166 Ibid., 183.
170 Ibid., 85.
As has been discussed, the assembled men and women eventually looted the town of provisions and quickly moved to a camp about three kilometers from Battleford, where they would rest only a short time before retreating to Poundmaker’s reserve. Despite the fact that the Cree had withdrawn from the town, the residents of Battleford remained in the fort. This can partially be explained by the terror created by the shocking news that James Payne, a local farm instructor, and Barney Tremont, a prejudiced and chauvinistic local rancher, had been murdered by several Stoney of Mosquito’s band on 30 March, about twenty-five miles from town. The effect of this news was formidable, as recounted by Robert Jefferson, “the Stonies had thrown down the gauntlet all the Indians were [perceived to be] involved.” Although both men had been killed for reasons unrelated to the Rebellion, the Battleford residents knew only that several white people were dead at the hands of local First Nations people.

While in the fort, the citizens of the Battleford area had a clear view of the looting and eventual incineration of much of their community, as the town site was close enough for direct observation, but it was situated beyond the range of Fort Battleford’s cannons. It is now known that the majority of the looting that occurred after the evening of 30 March was undertaken by a group of Métis, but the citizens of Battleford, still in fear of Poundmaker’s men, were not aware of this. These Métis looters were depicted in *Loyal till Death* as being “bent on continuing the ransacking of the town site

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172 Ibid., 187.
174 Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 101
that the Cree had started – only on a more systematic basis." On 4 April Mahaffy and Clinkskill’s general store was burned down and the residents of Battleford received news of the massacre at Frog Lake in what is now Alberta. This news, describing the indiscriminate slaughter of nine whites, including two local priests by members of Big Bear’s band added to the fear of a generalized First Nations uprising in the minds of the isolated Battleford residents. This feeling was again amplified when, on 8 April, a small group of Stoney warriors joined the Métis in looting the abandoned homes on the south side of the river and fought a brief skirmish with a patrol of the Battleford militia. Stonechild and Waiser explain that “this harassment – perhaps more than any single event to that moment – convinced the residents of the stockade that all the surrounding reserves had jointed the Métis agitation”

Throughout the entire month of April, the atmosphere inside the fort was tense. James Clinkskill clearly remembered the tension, writing that “in the night time frequent alarms sounded, when every man took his appointed station at a loop-hole made in the stockade.” It is not surprising that feelings of apprehension and fear were widespread within the walls of the stockade. The now-repaired telegraph line, as well as a number of messengers brought daily reports from the surrounding area, including vivid descriptions of burned homes and businesses. The presence of a number of Métis residents from the nearby village of Bresaylor added to the unease within the fort, a fear which was articulated by NWMP Inspector W.S. Morris in a telegram sent on 17 April,

177 Light, *Footprints in the Dust*, 214.
179 Quoted in Beal and Macleod, *Prairie Fire*, 205.
180 Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford*, 69.
stating that he “fear[ed] the enemy within more than I do without at this fort.”\textsuperscript{181} On top of these uncertainties, the hardships of daily living added to the mental stress of those inside Fort Battleford. Although there was a substantial quantity of rations within the fort, they were of dubious quality. Writing a number of years later, Clinkskill remembered that “the flour was all right but the bacon displayed all the colors of the rainbow, and tasted rank, however it was eatable if you had a strong appetite and a vigorous digestion.”\textsuperscript{182} To add to the mental and obvious physical discomfort of the citizens within the fort, the lack of a useable well meant that drinking water had to be obtained from the Battle River, five hundred meters from the safety of the stockade.\textsuperscript{183}

Those within the cramped fort received a reason for optimism on 14 April when it was learned that a column of the North-West Field Force was being dispatched for their relief, which, unfortunately did not last long.\textsuperscript{184} On 17 April, rumours began to circulate about the massacre of a number of NWMP by members of Big Bear’s band at the extremely vulnerable Fort Pitt.\textsuperscript{185} A courier sent to Fort Pitt from Battleford had been robbed and stabbed, and the resulting lack of news from Pitt seemed to bode poorly for the NWMP. These rumours were finally quashed on 21 April, when scouts from Fort Battleford discovered Fort Pitt’s Mounted Police traveling on a scow down the Saskatchewan River towards Battleford.\textsuperscript{186} The citizens of Battleford were relieved to find out that Fort Pitt had been abandoned with only three NWMP casualties, but terrified when the survivors expressed a belief that Big Bear’s band, the architects of the Frog

\textsuperscript{181} Light, \textit{Footprints in the Dust}, 263.
\textsuperscript{182} Quoted in Beal and Macleod, \textit{Prairie Fire}, 205.
\textsuperscript{183} Hildebrandt, \textit{Views from Fort Battleford}, 68.
\textsuperscript{184} Beal and Macleod, \textit{Prairie Fire}, 239.
\textsuperscript{185} Light, \textit{Footprints in the Dust}, 263.
\textsuperscript{186} McPherson, \textit{The Battlefords}, 93.
Lake massacre, were travelling east to meet up with Poundmaker. The coalition of Big Bear and Poundmaker’s bands was a very real fear of the citizens of the Battleford area, as the last real meeting of the two men was linked, in their minds, to the troubles at the thirst dance. Finally, the murder of settler Frank Smart, shot in the back by an unknown assailant while on patrol on 22 April, did nothing to reassure those within the fort. Even with Otter’s column camped within a few miles of the town of Battleford on the evening of 23 April, the destruction of the old town continued, with Métis scouts setting Judge Charles Rouleau’s house ablaze. Although Otter’s column reached the town on 24 April, it was not until five days later that settlers were ordered back to their homes. The Herald, incidentally, began publishing again on 23 April, with the opening headline reading “Battleford Beleaguered”.

As has been demonstrated, the Herald played an important role in influencing the viewpoint of the citizens of the Battleford area towards their First Nations neighbours. This biased understanding led to both the initial move to Fort Battleford, and provided a frame in which to view the events that occurred during of the occupation of the stockade. Although potentially the largest factor, the treatment of First Nations groups by Herald must not be considered to be the only element that led to the siege. An examination of both the 1881 and 1891 censuses show that the majority of settlers in the Battleford district were of Anglo-Saxon descent, and, of these, the majority had migrated from Ontario. Consequently, it is important to consider the knowledge and preconceptions that these settlers might have brought with them upon emigrating to the West. The

187 Beal and Macleod, Prairie Fire, 239.
188 Stonechild and Waiser, Loyal till Death, 135.
189 Hildebrandt, Views from Fort Battleford, 76.
190 “Battleford Beleaguered”, Saskatchewan Herald, 23 April 1885, 1.
literature on the stereotypical treatment of First Nations groups and individuals, as mentioned earlier, within the print media of the 1880s, indicates that even prior to their arrival in Battleford settlers would have been exposed to a particular representation of First Nations people, especially those of the plains of western North America. This made it easier for these settlers to trust the representations within Laurie’s Herald. One topic that received a great deal of press coverage both in the United States and Canada was that of the “Indian Wars” that took place between 1866 and 1891, a conflict that climaxed in the years 1867-69.191

With the onset of the Indian Wars (also referred to collectively as the “Western War”), American newspapers had extensive experience in reporting military battles, stemming from the coverage of the Civil War. First-hand reports from the sites of major battles were very popular, and as Oliver Knight notes in Following the Indian Wars, “adventure and the hero rated high in reader appeal, and war correspondents contributed their bit through accounts of their own adventures as well as through the adventures of others.”192 While reports at the beginning of the Indian Wars were sent in by non-journalistic eyewitnesses, by 1867 embedded correspondent reporters began chronicling events from the front lines.

Although each reporter had a unique journalistic style, the general reporting of the Indian Wars shared a number of similarities. Tales of skirmishes and battles were generally reported in a highly descriptive narrative style. Although reporters worked for specific newspapers, once a report was published, it could quickly receive wide

192 Ibid.,10.
circulation through the Associated Press. 193 Although an effort was made to ensure that facts and figures were generally accurate, liberties were often taken in the description of battles. Knight explains that reporters often used “certain narrative devices – common enough then, forbidden now – of describing the thoughts and feelings of the Indians at the moment of attack when he had no way of knowing what those thoughts and feelings were.” 194 This type of reporting was problematic, as the opinions of individual journalists became presented as fact. Additionally, the pull towards sensationalism was often difficult to resist. In the aftermath of the 1876 Battle of Little Big Horn in the Dakota Territory (now South Dakota), for example, despite a shortage of reliable information, newspapers immediately presented shocking stories of how General Custer and his men had all been killed. 195 This tendency towards shock tactics is further demonstrated in the headlines of the 6 July 1876 edition of the Helena Herald: “GREAT BATTLE WITH THE INDIANS --- Terrific Slaughter --- GEN. CUSTAR’S [sic] COMMAND ANNIHILATED.” Although further removed from the battle, Toronto’s Globe was not immune to publishing lurid headlines, with an article entitled “General Custer’s Defeat and Death --- Sitting Bull’s Bloody Career” was printed on 10 July 1876. 196 Headlines such as these would certainly have influenced the views held by Euro-Canadians towards the First Nations people of the western prairies, and would have

193 Knight, Following the Indian Wars, 91.
194 Ibid., 94.
196 “General Custer’s Defeat and Death,” Toronto Globe, 10 July 1876.
factored into the perspectives of those who would eventually settle in the Battleford region.\textsuperscript{197}

It was not just through coverage of the Indian Wars of the western United States that newcomers to Battleford area got information about the original inhabitants of the plains.\textsuperscript{198} The purchase and transfer of Rupert’s Land by Canada in 1869-70 provided Eastern Canadian newspapers the opportunity to describe the First Nations inhabitants of the West. An issue of the Toronto Globe, published on 25 May 1869, explained to readers that the First Nations of the Canadian plains “are very different from the timid and cringing creatures who are now the sole representatives of the Indian race in the back settlements of [eastern] Canada.” Within the pages of Eastern newspapers, First Nations groups of the plains were often referred to as “war-like” or “savage” during the late 1860s and early 1870s.\textsuperscript{199} The portrayal of prairie First Nations groups as unpredictable and potentially dangerous would have coloured the perceptions of settlers to the Battleford region, and provided a receptive audience for the particular stereotypes and attitudes of Laurie’s Herald.

Another important consideration is that the citizens of Battleford were not alone in retreating to a defensive position when feeling threatened. In 1877, during the conflict between the Nez Perce and United States Army, this type of action was taken several times. In his book \textit{Children of Grace: The Nez Perce War of 1877}, Bruce Hampton describes how a number of murders committed by members of the Nez Perce nation resulted in the building of a stockade in the town of Mount Idaho, declaring that

\textsuperscript{197} As would other expressions of popular culture such as art, photographs, popular music and other forms of literature, which are outside the scope of this study.
\textsuperscript{198} Anderson and Robertson, \textit{Seeing Red}, 24.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 34.
“volunteers blocked the street with wagons and logs and lost no time constructing a small fort just above town.”  

Further afield, settlers in Montana “began constructing three strongholds throughout the valley and arming themselves. Panic was great when news of the Idaho uprising first spread...” Despite this panic (and the exaggerated characterization of a few killings as a general uprising), the defensive structures that were created were not put to use for any length of time. Closer to Battleford, the citizens of Prince Albert constructed a makeshift fort after the Battle of Duck Lake, which consisted of a high wall of cordwood set up around the perimeter of the Presbyterian churchyard.

Despite being much closer to the major battles of the Rebellion, the citizens of Prince Albert only utilized their fort once, on 28 March when a false alarm resulted in a mad dash to the church. The *Prince Albert Times and Saskatchewan Review* reported that “No attack came, but the women, the old and the young spent a miserable night within the fort.” Other communities in the North-West Territories either considered or partially constructed defensive positions, but these generally remained unused. The idea to create defensive positions in the event of perceived First Nations danger seems to have been common in western North America; however, the Siege of Battleford remains unique due to the duration of time spent within the walls by community residents.

An important consideration in evaluating the events of late March and April 1885 are the theories surrounding siege mentality. Siege mentality, as portrayed by Daniel Bar-Tel in *Shared Beliefs in a Society: Social Psychological Analysis*, is the perception

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201 Ibid., 136.
203 *Prince Albert Times and Saskatchewan Review*, August 7, 1885.
“that the rest of the world has highly negative intentions towards one’s society … [the belief] that their society is surrounded by a hostile world.”

Bar-Tel argues that siege mentalities can serve an important function within a society, as these beliefs can help societies deal with adversity, unite under a set of common goals, and provide a simplified frame through which citizens can view a complex world. Societies with siege beliefs can often be recognized by an extreme sensitivity to information coming from other societies. According to Bar-Tel, “this sensitivity is based on lack of trust and the suspicion that society members feel toward other societies, which in their view have negative intentions.”

Such a lack of trust and suspicion was evident in many of the references to First Nations groups contained within the pages of the Herald. Bar-Tel goes on to explain that this sensitivity leads members of the society to prepare for the worst possible events, and increases the likelihood of conformity within the society. In the case of Battleford, this seems to explain the near universality of the initial move to the NWMP fort (prior to the arrival of Poundmaker), as well as the sustained occupation by area citizens, even when the town itself appeared to be calm.

Although at first glance this description of siege mentality has many similarities with the actions of the community at Battleford, of the three causes for societal siege beliefs that Bar-Tel identifies, only one applies to the situation in early 1885. This foundation of siege beliefs within a society is “long-remembered experiences involving the negative intentions of the world at large.”

Although Battleford was established less than fifteen years prior to the beginning of the North-West Rebellion, the community had

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204 Bar-Tel, Shared Beliefs in a Society, 101.
205 Ibid., 116.
206 Ibid., 106.
experienced a number of major disappointments. Both the rerouting of the Canadian Pacific Railway to the southern prairies and the relocation of the capital city to Regina hit the citizens of Battleford hard, a fact evidenced by the frequent complaints about these topics within the pages of the *Herald.*  

In addition, the considerable number of reserves in the vicinity of the town, a slow and inconsistent mail service, inadequate telegraph lines, and the perception of a lack of representation within government all contributed to a sense of disconnect from the rest of Canada. Despite this, it is difficult to fit the Siege of Battleford neatly into Bar-Tel’s framework, as this theoretical structure was designed as a tool to examine large societies, although the commonalities provide an interesting consideration. These similarities could certainly lead to further research on the topic of the behaviours of small communities in the face of perceived danger.

What is obvious is that, in the words of Beal and Macleod, “the Battleford whites were besieged not by Indians but by their own fears of Indians, [fears that were] magnified by the killings of Farm Instructor Payne and farmer “Barney the Belgian” Tremant and of the nine whites at Frog Lake.” By the beginning of March 1885, the citizens of Battleford had constructed a particular view of their First Nations neighbours, a mix of opinions and fears that had been established prior to the arrival in Battleford but were shaped and fine-tuned by P.G. Laurie and the *Herald.* Though the stereotypes presented about First Nations groups and individuals within the pages of the *Herald* were characteristic of both the era and the location, the quantity of the coverage combined with

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207 “Pile of Bones, Regina, etc.”, *Saskatchewan Herald,* 30 September 1882, 1. Other examples can be found in the issues of 14 October 1882, and 14 April 1883.

208 See, for example, Editorial, *Saskatchewan Herald,* 3 March 1883, 1.

the emphasis on the negative characteristics of Chiefs Poundmaker and Big Bear and the sensationalized reporting of the thirst dance incident of the previous year, all contributed to the a particular view of the local First Nations population that help to explain the level of panic experienced by the citizens of Battleford. As a result of the beliefs that had been built up over a number of years, the citizens of Battleford were influenced to take the action of abandoning their homes and farms, actions that may have directly resulted in the initial looting. Once in the fort, the combination of the events of the night of 30 March, the reports of First Nations violence in the vicinity, and the eventual ransacking and burning of their town reinforced the fears already held by the Battleford community. These perceptions and fears led the Euro-Canadian population of Battleford to remain confined within the walls of their tiny fort until aid arrived with Colonel Otter’s column of the North-West Field Force. Without the Saskatchewan Herald and its particular reporting frames and style, the events of March and April 1885 may have taken an entirely different, and perhaps less dramatic, turn.
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