

The Boundary Commission Trail began as a First Nations' travel and trading route. Later, fur traders of the 18th Century used the trail when partnering with Indigenous trappers.

In 1818, Canada and the USA agreed, from Lake of the Woods to Rocky Mountains, the border would be drawn along the 49th parallel. The final agreement occurred in 1846, though the border remained unmarked for almost 30 more years.

In those years, the USA was expanding to the west and north. Canada, felt the need to identify their border quickly. They decided to disregard thousands of years of Indigenous ownership, though, by first making a deal with the Hudson's Bay Company to "purchase" Rupert's Land, and then, in 1870, by sending in the surveyors unannounced.

This is where I enter the pages of history. I'm William Hallett. My family moved to Red River when I was a young teen. I knew of massive buffalo herds roaming the prairies. I wanted to be there! I eventually became known as a respected, celebrated buffalo hunter and trader!

If you remember, the Red River Resistance was a Metis uprising in Red River from 1869 to 1870, sparked by Canada surveying Metis settlements without consulting our Metis leaders. The survey was intended to prepare the land for Ontario settlers. Louis Riel led the Metis resistance.

I, on the other hand, was one of the Metis in opposition to Louis Riel, and acted as a guide for the first lieutenant governor into Manitoba. I was in favour of the survey. So I was arrested and imprisoned by Riel, and then released in time to help mark the 49th parallel. In 1872 two boundary commission parties, American and Canadian, headed west from Lake of the Woods.

Over the next two summers, they worked their way with a body of 30 mounted Métis scouts, dubbed the '49th Rangers'. Our job was to lead the procession of labourers; to break trail. I was honored to serve as Head Scout of the Rangers that first summer! Cutting through the Turtle Mountain forest and fording the Souris were particularly difficult.

In addition to being a military escort, we acted as guides and hunters, marked trails and found appropriate campsites. Most importantly, we brought information to First Nations. With our language skills we explained the purpose of the survey. We distributed gifts as tokens of good intention, and promised the government would soon initiate treaties. As a result, the Commissioners were allowed to pass safely through unceded territory.

The survey was completed in the summer of 1874. Near the end of that year the North-West Mounted Police used the trail to establish and represent Canada's desire for control over both the land and people of the North-West.



The Boundary Commission Trail, seen here just south of Melita, felt the footsteps of First Nations, heard the creaking of our Metis hunting party carts, and now offers passage to settlers heading west; transporting goods and children; carrying their dreams along the newly created Canada-USA border. May history judge us kindly.

***Boundary Commission Trail*** is based on stories in *Vantage Points 1 and 3*.

*Vantage Points Flashbacks* were written by David Neufeld with help from Betty Sawatzky. They were originally aired on CJRB Radio out of Boissevain, Manitoba in the early 2020s.