

Trail honours leaders past and present



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It was a beautiful fall day as members of the Métis community, representatives of three levels of government, and the public gathered to mark the opening of Gabriel Dufault Trail on the banks above the Seine River.

The trail honours two much-loved leaders within the Métis community — Louis Riel Sr. from the distant past and Gabriel Dufault from present times.

The trail starts at John Bruce Road (West). It winds north for a few hundred metres behind a trailer park and Meadowood Manor. It crosses the river lots that were owned by Louis Riel Sr. (Miller of the Seine) and Julie Lagimodière. The trail ends at a scenic point behind The Haven overlooking the Riel Mill site. This is where Louis Riel Sr. used the river to operate a unique “overshot” grist mill in the 1850s.

The remains of the mill’s earthworks were verified in 1975. This sparked an interest in creating Riel Heritage Park but few concrete steps were ever taken.

When The Haven development was proposed in 2003, Save Our Seine, the Manitoba

Métis Federation, and Union Nationale Métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba (UNMSJ) lobbied for a modest interpretive centre on this site.

Gabriel Dufault (1941 - 2015) was president of UNMSJ at that time and helped lead the charge. UNMSJ is the oldest Métis organization in Canada. Its goals are to protect and develop French-Canadian Métis society, traditions and culture and to share French-Canadian Métis history.

The Riel family river lot was seen as an ideal location to interpret Métis history — including the river lot system. Narrow river lots ensured every homestead had access to the river, woodlands along its shores, and hay land farther away from the river.

Ironically, the bid for the interpretive centre hit a major roadblock: poor public access. It is landlocked by past developments. Fulfillment of this dream will require community spirit and cooperation from every property owner near the river to allow greater public



Photo by Michele Kading

The Gabriel Dufault Trail is a beautiful nature walkway along the Seine River.

access to this unique heritage site.

Thanks to St. Vital Coun. Brian Mayes, Saint Boniface-Saint Vital MP Dan Vandal, and St. Boniface Coun. Matt Allard for taking the first step by allocating city funds for the new trail. I think Louis Riel Sr. and Gabriel Dufault would both be pleased. The timing was pretty good too — UNMSJ celebrates its 130th anniversary in 2017.

Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine — www.saveourseine.com