

Shining Mountains Living Community Services

3rd in Series



Métis People



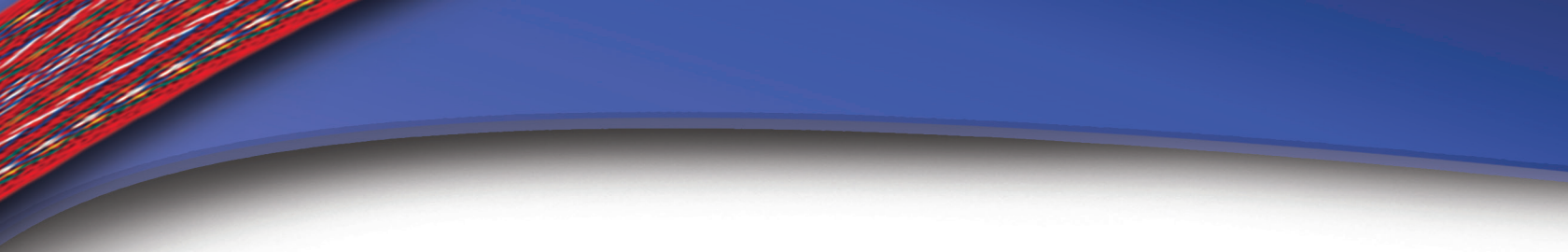




Table of Contents

MÈTIS	3
HISTORY OF: MÈTIS ORIGINS.....	7
HISTORY OF: MÈTIS & FUR TRADE	9
HISTORY OF: MÈTIS INDUSTRY	11
RELIGIOUS IMPACTS.....	13
MÈTIS FOODS & MEDICINE	14
CULTURAL FESTIVITES & OCCASIONS.....	15
MÈTIS MUSIC & DANCE	15
HISTORY OF: MÈTIS CLOTHING	17
COLONIZATION IMPACTS ON THE MÈTIS PEOPLE.....	18
COLONIES	19
GOVERNMENT IMPACT ON METIS RIGHTS	20
SCRIP	22
WESTWARD MOVEMENT	22
METIS SYMBOLS	25
METIS in CURRENT TIMES	27
ADDRESSING VULNERABILITY ISSUES.....	29
Important Dates for Alberta Métis.....	31
Resource Material/ Recommended Reading	33

MÉTIS

Métis people are often referred to as the 'invisible' or 'forgotten' people, or as the 'roadside' people. In the colonial government papers and often in the western provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan the term commonly used was 'half-breed'. The Métis became a nation caught between two opposing worlds; European and Aboriginal.

Nied Child of Two Worlds By Pauline Inglehart

I look into the mirror
And who do I see?
A child of two worlds,
Child of the Métis.
My thoughts wander away
To a time long ago
Out on the open prairie,
Which was white with snow.
A hunter in buckskins
Stands by a tepee
And close by his side is
Someone who looks like me.
Back to the mirror;
I see dark laughing eyes,
Thick, dark, long hair,
Eyes that shine with surprise.
I daydream of a happy life
A free time gone away
From the lonesome prairie
Where buffalo used to play.



Now it's evening by a fire

And someone hums a
lullaby

And the dark, happy faces

Are at peace beneath the
sky.

I see a clear, clean lake

And fish easy to take:

And children splashing at
play

In that time gone away.

Many people in a circle

Listen to the Chief explain.

The must as the Great
Father

Through a dance to send
rain.



Métis National Anthem

In the forest on river, and across the western plain.

As the whit man journeyed westward, to the land of the Indian.

A new race was created, a new nation rose up strong.

Hardship as its destiny, and its curse to not belong.

In the land from which they came, in the land they helped to build.

They found themselves the alien, found their vision unfulfilled.

And despite their valiant effort, to defend what they believe.

When at last the battle ended, they were only left to grieve.

We are proud to be Métis, Watch our Nation rise again.

Never more forgotten people, We're the true Canadian.

From across the plain they traveled, from Red River to the Peace.

Looking for their own homeland, that would help them to replace.

All the land that had been taken, and the dreams that had been dashed.

Their brave hero's now called traitors, and courageous deeds now past.

But their sprit was not broken, and their dreams never died.

As they waited for the battle, that would end years of pain.

And the final bloodless battle, when the Nation rose again.

We are proud to be Métis, Watch our Nation rise again.

Never more forgotten people, We're the true Canadian.

For this newest generation, and the future ones to come.

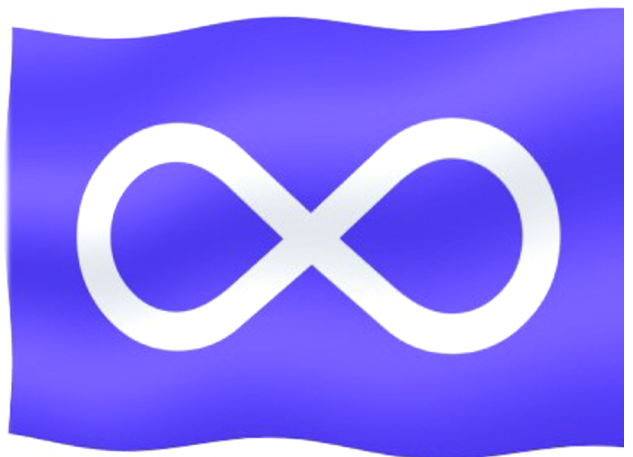
With the past to motivate us, it will help us to keep strong.


As we build the Métis Nation, and watch it rise again.

Our past lost it's motivation, to watch its future gain.

We are proud to be Métis, Watch our Nation rise again.

Never more forgotten people, We're the true Canadian.





Public knowledge, awareness or information of Métis people is generally quite limited and almost invariably involves some mixed messages and information surrounding Louis Riel and occasionally his Lieutenant Gabriel Dumont. Even today, the general public often believe that the Métis did not have an active role in Canada's history; Métis people existed and contributed significantly to Canada's history long before Louis Riel. Today new Métis leaders address current political and cultural concerns about a Nation that was and remains a part of the "mosaic" of Canada's people. In 1885, the formalized Canadian government hung Louis Riel as a traitor, due to his lobbying for fair treatment for Métis people and asking the Canadian government to honour its word to the Métis. The Métis Nation did not die with this hanging. Métis people are a nation defined by strong individuality, independence and resiliency in the people. The Canadian Constitution was finally amended in 1982 to recognize the Métis as a distinct and legitimate Aboriginal people.

Registration for Métis people in Alberta requires that the applicant provide a genealogy background that proves his/her ancestor received Métis script.

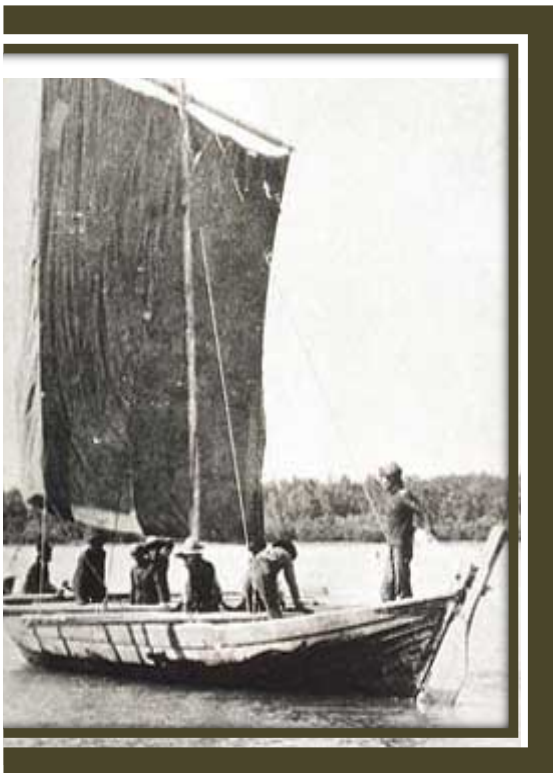
HISTORY OF: MÈTIS ORIGINS

The word *Métis* may have been derived from Latin “miscere” or “mix” which indicates the mixed blood of children born from unions between Aboriginal (generally Cree or Ojibwa) woman and French fathers. Over time its meaning extended to all individuals having Caucasian or European and Aboriginal ancestry.

In eastern Canada the children were often absorbed into either the maternal or paternal cultures of Aboriginal or European families. Those children kept within the mother’s culture lived within and were part of the mother’s tribe, when raised within the culture of the father they were educated in France or England and learned to speak and live as their father did. Until recently these children and the ensuing generations generally lost contact with their mother’s people, traditions, and spirituality. Lately, however, the need to regain those missing cultural and family links has resulted in the start of a re-growth in the eastern Métis people.

West of Ontario however, a different set of circumstances took place and the Métis grew from there. Here, the influence of European colonists was slower to be felt and often mixed blood adults, moved with the hunters and explorers and were more able to mix the elements of both cultures. These individuals were important to the fur trade, being the first truly “bi-lingual” people, were also in fact “bi-cultural”. They saw themselves as unique having distinct and separate culture from either of the parent’s cultures, having a distinct language as well as a distinct lifestyle. Often the Métis would combine the agricultural living of the colonists with the migratory life of the hunters.





Originally when the young European men or “Voyagers” came to the colonies to seek their fortunes in the fur trade, they developed Indian alliances and actively sought the companionship of Indian women. Various reasons led to the ongoing relationships; firstly, there were few if any unmarried and available European women. Secondly but perhaps most importantly, Indian women could ensure their comfort and survival by making them necessary items such as clothing including moccasins and jackets, snowshoes and trail food known as pemmican and assist the men as a vital trading partner.

Initially, the colonial government of eastern Canada attempted to enforce restrictions on these relationships between Indian women and European men. These efforts failed to prevent sexual as well as economic exploitation of the women. The women brought into the forts to learn the value of European trade items or “goods” and then used to gain economic control over native communities, by having them introduce the luxury goods to their societies and families. This exposure to European lifestyles, amenities and commodities ensured the increase of European dominance and control of aboriginal people.




HISTORY OF: MÈTIS & FUR TRADE

The expansion of the transportation and trading network increased the demand on European labour resources in the new world at the same time the continental wars were demanding manpower on the continent. The demand for fashionable fur items such as ‘beaver hats’ expanded in Europe and this rapidly increased the need of the trading companies for a ready supply of low cost labour. This provided the growing Métis population with as opportunity for new roles opened by the trading industry, which they were ideally suited to fill. The restrictions once placed on relations between European men and Aboriginal women were relaxed, common law marriages became acceptable and the resulting children inherited a unique status. The mixed blood children came to be recognized by the government and economic system as “half-breeds”. The efficiency of the half breeds at efforts of hunting and trapping made it essential to the fur trade to maintain this occupational group of individuals.

The fur trade became dependent on the Métis for the profitability of the companies; in turn the Métis became dependent on the companies for employment. They filled the roles of the hunters, trappers and middlemen but were prohibited from any other positions, especially those that held power. Until the mid- 1700’s the half breeds of Eastern Canada were exploited and repressed and had no specific place in the economic mainstream. The majority of eastern Métis either assimilated into the European culture or lived within the Aboriginal culture.

In the west there was little invasive European influence during the early to mid 1700’s. Buffalo were still plentiful, Aboriginal people; both Indian and Métis lived a nomadic hunter lifestyle. It was in





this environment that a distinct and separate Métis culture evolved. Métis and Indian tribes lived in and settled in the northwest region prior to the influx of European immigrants. The Métis were the earliest of the pioneers, a bridge between two distinct civilizations; they adapted European technology to the demands of the harshness of the land and taught the encroaching newcomers the local life and trade skills required for survival. These early Métis of the west were able to develop and maintain their own cultural identity. Métis people began to view themselves as neither European nor Indian, but as a separate and distinct nation.

Settlement of the west gradually proceeding and the steady flow of the settlers posed threats to the existence of the Métis from the beginning. The immigrant settlers brought prevailing attitudes from the east, the foremost belief being that European cultures were superior. Progress meant that Indian culture had to “give way” to the settlement of the land. Métis people meanwhile had inherited an attachment to and the appreciation for the land and valued their own way of life. European settlers encountering Métis people faced more than the challenges of a language and customs barrier, they were confronted with people who values an entirely different lifestyle. The clash between the values of the two distinct forms of culture occurred repeatedly during the settlement of the west. The Métis prized their semi-nomadic life style while the European settlers clung to the values of a sedentary and non migratory life.

HISTORY OF: MÉTIS INDUSTRY

Further settling of western Canada provided an impetus that led to many Métis working in various capacities for the trading companies. The rise of the fur trade in the west and the establishment of large fur trading companies such as the *Hudson Bay Company* and its rival the *Northwest Fur Company* did much to build the sense of uniqueness of the “children of the fur trade”. The Métis men combined the flamboyantly colourful style of their voyager fathers and the wilderness skills of their Indian heritage as they traveled the rivers working for one company or the other. These men often developed a strong sense of loyalty to their employing company, serving as trappers, fisherman, guides, interpreters, traders and post managers. Other Métis were semi-nomadic living on small farms for a portion of the year and following the buffalo during the remainder of it. Still others created commercial freighting with the *Red River carts*. These men often found their wives among the Cree, Assiniboine and Saulteaux nations.

While Métis men were successful in hunting, trapping and freighting endeavours, the Métis women were also industrious. The glass trading beads of the fur companies were adapted into decorations for leatherwork. Traditional Indian leather work had been decorated with intricate designs of porcupine quills. Métis women combined leather, fur and beads and fashioned cloths with a pattern similar to European dress styles. A combining of French foods such as ground flour and Indian cooking methods (frying) resulted in bannock, fried bread and various soups and stews. Through the inventiveness of Métis women, many aspects of Indian and European cultures were blended together.

With the increase in colonization and a decrease in the fur trade, time slowly challenged the lifestyle enjoyed by these women and men. The two trading companies were merged into the single *Hudson's Bay Company*. Forts were abandoned and the Métis working for them were left unemployed. The colonial government and trading company encouraged the Métis families to relocate to the Red River



settlement in Manitoba and accept an agricultural existence. Some did, but the majority chose to remain hunters and trappers and with an increased demand for pemmican they became buffalo hunters.

Buffalo hunters were well respected within the Métis people and they developed laws which governed the behaviour accepted by the hunters. These became known as “laws of the hunt” and governed days of acceptable hunting, appropriate behaviour/rules/laws governing the hunt and punishment for breaking the rules. The area known as the Red River became a focal gathering point for the Métis people. From this place the men could farm if they chose too, but others could maintain their traditional hunting, trapping and fishing lifestyle as well.



RELIGIOUS IMPACTS

Religion was brought to the Métis people mainly by two separate sources. The first priests were Catholic, but they were shortly followed by Anglican missionaries. By the mid 1850's the division was fairly even with approximately half the Métis following the buffalo hunts converting to Catholicism and those of the agricultural segment generally adopting the Anglican faith. Some of the Métis continued to follow Aboriginal spirituality often mixed with Catholic or Anglican rites, especially regarding holidays such as Easter and Christmas.

The breadth of this conversion was partially due to the work of priests and missionaries in the hunting camps and colonies, but also due to the fact that frequently the industrial and residential schools made little difference between accepting First Nations or Métis children into the schools. Additionally since the father was almost exclusively white many of them insisted that their child (ran) be raised in their parental faith, these fathers often “paid” for the privilege of having their child in the residential school. Although the combination of priest/missionaries and the schools were relatively successful in extinguishing aboriginal spiritual practice, they were much less successful in instilling the values of sedentary life, so the Métis remained mainly nomadic, pushing ever westward to maintain their separateness and their lifestyle.

Today many of the Métis people practice a blend of both Aboriginal spirituality and contemporary Christianity. They know both the ‘rote’ prayers of the memory and those of heart and moment.



MÉTIS FOODS & MEDICINE

Métis homes were and still are known for homemade soups. Tea and oven baked bannock. Food was generally supplied by nature. Métis soup making meant adding a wide variety of nutritious foods into a single pot and simmering them together. Some ingredients commonly used were bones, fish, barley, wild rice, onions, and root vegetables. There were no recipes of amounts only combinations, to feed unexpected family or visitor more items were added to the mix. Métis families shared food staples among one another. Cooking and food preparation styles were created from a blend of European and First Nations methods.

Medicine was based on First Nations ancestral teachings and many things were used as food or medicine depending on the need. Teas were common medicine and were made from wild grown common plants, such as Red Willow Bark, sage, yarrow, nettle leaves, dandelion roots, rosehips, cranberries and wild ginger.

Poultice could be made from onions or mustard to relieve chest congestion. While applications of spruce Gum or frog leaves were useful in healing cuts and sores.



CULTURAL FESTIVITIES & OCCASIONS

MÉTIS MUSIC & DANCE

Many of the social occasions called by Métis were almost always energetic, boisterous and colourful affairs. Music abounded and included the use of fiddles, drums, spoons, and mouth organs. Dancing bridged both aboriginal and European styles to create distinctly Métis dances such as the Red River jig and various forms of ‘jigging’ became very popular. Scottish dancing and music fit well into the Métis life and when combined with drums and free style dance steps brought a unique form to Métis colonies. Festivities arose whenever there was a chance for the Métis to gather, but was especially popular in the winter months as a break from monotony imposed by cold weather. Other times of celebration or festivity were developed around hunting, especially the all important ‘Spring Hunt’ as a successful hunt was a reason for much celebration.

Métis people traditionally used a variety of instruments, some borrowed from both sides of their mixed ancestors and some utilized readily available items. These included the fiddle, concertina (later to become the accordion) harmonica, the hand drum, mouth harp, spoons or bones made excellent finger instruments. The major instrument was the fiddle, Métis people made theirs from birch bark and maple wood.

The style of Métis music is also a distinctive blend between European and First Nations ancestry. There is no bar structure and this uniqueness provides for a distinctive bounce to the Métis tunes. Métis fiddle music is an oral tradition handed down over the centuries, with many of the Métis legends recorded in the music. “Tutelage”, is another Métis music tradition, which involves beating out of a rhythm with bells or spoons along with syllables being hummed to basic melodies.

Métis jigging is also unique, in that rhythm supplied by spoons, bones or toe tapping along with the irregular beats of the fiddle gives bounce in jigging not seen in other forms. Although Métis jigging is



similar to the Scottish/Irish version, Métis jig is a rapid moving dance that is unique in style. Traditional Métis dances include the Waltz Quadrille, the square dance, red river jog and drops of brandy.

Métis people were very competitive and this competition was displayed in a variety of ways. Horses were well groomed, saddled blanket were decorated and beaded and leather work on bridles, halters and such was often braided or decorated with metal work. Sleighs for winter travel were often painted and decorated with elaborate and beautiful designs. Games of skill and chance such as card playing were other popular forms of competition. Jiggers competed to determine who would develop the fastest and fanciest footwork.

Métis women were also very much in competition with each other over designs beaded or sewn into clothing, weaving of material, tanning of hides as well as domestic areas such as food preparation and the cleanliness of their homes. Clothing both for themselves and their families was unique and highly individualized; it often illustrated the mixed culture and preferences.





HISTORY OF: MÉTIS CLOTHING

Typical clothing for the Métis people was a mix of aboriginal culture and European design. This resulted in creating a more tailored look in leather coats or jackets that were decorated in beautiful bead and quill work. Original patterns were often of geometric designs; however the Métis women adopted their work to be appealing to the Europeans. The women were inspired in the development of floral beadwork that highlighted both European and Native elements; the created crafts bridged both cultures and appealed to both worlds. Other items often created and individualized in the Métis world were pouches for tobacco, beaded and furred moccasins, wrap around and high topped mukluks. Beautiful shawls and woven sashes were also of significance in the Métis life. Day to day clothing for women reflected their need for useful garments as skirts were often heavy and dark but color was included with a bright scarf, shawl or bead work moccasins.



COLONIZATION IMPACTS ON THE MÈTIS PEOPLE

Canada was established as a country by the governments Great Britain and France, both of whom justified the subjugation of the native people and the economic exploitation of the natural resources as a right of government. The oppression and subjugation of the Métis people is a direct result of the combination of policies and tactics undertaken by three distinct groups: the fur trade companies, the recognized religion (churches) and the Canadian Government.

The majority of the original missionaries and priests acted in good faith when developing the trust of the first nations and Métis people. However, they also believed that the population of all aboriginal people needed to be converted in order to save their soul even if this salvation resulted in cultural genocide. This very dedication made the missionaries effective allies of both the fur trade companies and the colonial government of Canada. For instance during the 1885 rebellion of Lois Riel, a trusted priest, Father Andre, was used by the Government to provide information to identify individuals involved in the resistance.

The Hudson Bay Company considered their presence in what was originally called Rupert's land, to be for economic purposes only and originally restricted unions between the European employee and a First Nation woman. They also did not encourage the employee to remain in the area after their contract was finished, but encouraged them to trade their traplines, equipment and "assistant or wife" to the next employee. It was not until the 1880's when the company was facing economic problems related to supplies and transportation that they began to copy the routines of the North West Trading Company in encouraging continuous and close aboriginal alliances. The children from these unions were recognized as a valuable cheap labour pool. These individuals had at least two languages and often more, could survive and thrive in the wilderness and felt a sense of loyalty to the fur companies.

COLONIES

In Manitoba, the Métis people established thriving communities throughout the area known as the Northwest, especially on the Red and Assiniboine rivers. This area later became known as the Red River areas of southern Manitoba. The plots of land were arranged by the Métis so that each home had access to water through the river frontage as well had land for farming. This area was ideally located for those involved in providing provisions to and shipping furs for the North West Trading Company. Governor, Lord Selkirk, was encouraged by the HBC to settle emigrants from Scotland on the land as the HBC needed to interrupt or end the help given to NWT Company. In 1812, HBC needed to interrupt or end the help given to NWT Company. In 1812, HBC leased 116,000 acres to the Governor for only 10 shillings, on the condition that the settlers supply the HBC with food and the retired employees could settle in the community. This was done with no consultation with the Métis, who already had homes there and no consideration was given to their occupancy of the land. When the new settlers tried to restrict the Métis hunting and trading activities conflict arose and continued until the two companies merged in 1821. The HBC transferred “ownership” of “Rupert’s land” to the newly established Dominion of Canada for the sum of 300, 00 pounds sterling and 5% of the fertile lands. This land transfer was also conducted without any consultation of the Métis or First Nations people and set the pattern for forcing the Métis people off land on which they had established homes.

The Métis were extremely worried about the sale of their homeland to a foreign nation without having been given and warning nor any opportunity to present their concerns to any governing body. This concern was fostered and encouraged by disgruntled HBC employees who were afraid that they too would lose their power and positions if the land were turned over to the newly formed government of Canada.



GOVERNMENT IMPACT ON METIS RIGHTS

Changes to the Indian Act in 1869, disenfranchised Indian women who married European men, this created the process of legitimizing Indian ancestry through the male line only, and these methods were in direct contrast to the traditional succession of identity and band membership through the mother's line. The change began to transfer the matriarchal traditions and society to the patriarchal laws and society of the Europeans. It also began the procedure of detaching the Métis from their Indian Heritage and resulted in the Métis people becoming the forgotten people or invisible people of Canada.

The federal government refused to recognize basis rather than as a group. This ideology was reinforced in the multiculturalism act of 1988 which focused on limiting diversity and attempted to ensure that ethnic groups remained as individual members and not viewed as a national group or nation of people.

The Indian act was modified in 1876 by the federal government in order to exclude the Métis for the first time from the treaty process, prior to this there had been no distinction in Treaty rights between the Indians (full blood) and the mixed blood people. This modification introduced a class system that had not existed in the aboriginal communities before. The people most affected were the First Nations, Indians and Métis (half breeds or mixed blood) were allowed no opportunity to voice their opinions regarding the annihilation of their traditional way of life. This approach set the tone for Canada's relationships with the original inhabitants of the land. There were to be three categories of citizens recognized in Canada: English-Canadian, French-Canadian and "others" with only the first two groups having constitutional rights. The Métis were included in the third group and were not even deemed worth negotiating with, their lands were not negotiated for but instead were confiscated without discussion and they were rendered homeless.

The Manitoba Act of 1869 stated that 1.4 million acres of land was to be designated for the "children of half-breed families", this was part of the agreement made between the Dominion of Canada and the Provincial Government, created by Louis Riel in 1867. The Provincial Government was dissolved

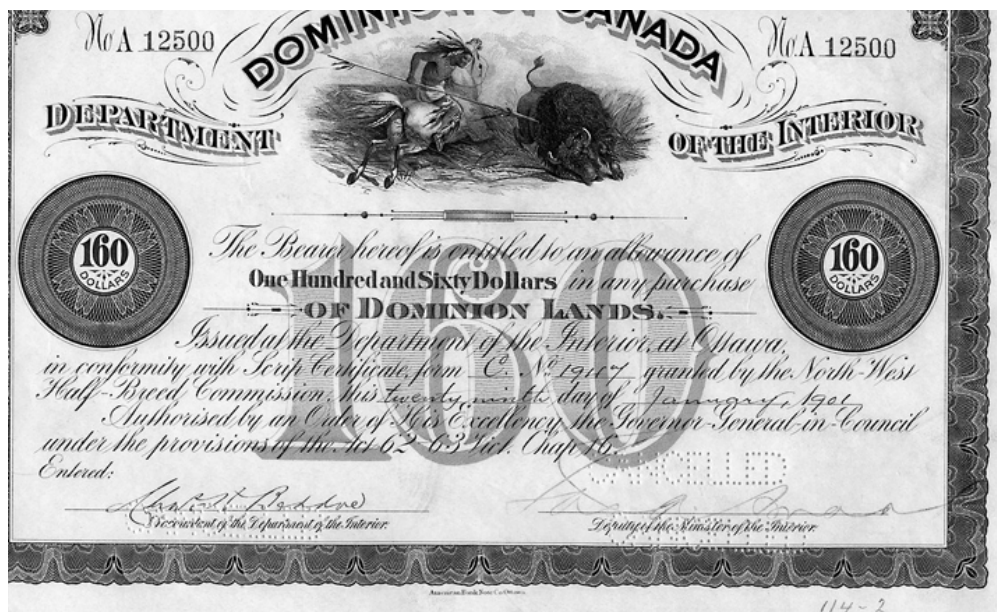
in good faith but the promise of land was never kept. In 1871, the Manitoba Governor Archibald invited the “breeds” to select the townships in which they would establish homes, the Métis as a group, selected property along the river front and branches of the Red River. This act was criticized for allowing indiscriminate occupation of large tracts of land by the half-breeds and the governor was advised to leave the Dominion Government to carry out their policies without interference. Loir Riel was nominated and elected to parliament but the members of parliament (non-aboriginal) voted to deny him his duly elected seat in the House of Commons. The federal government even attempted to bribe him with an offer of \$35,000.00 if he agreed to leave Canada, an offer Riel refused. It became obvious fears of the Métis that their political voice and rights were to be eliminated were well founded.

The federal government in 1873 passed an amendment that children of half-breed who had married prior to 1870 were heads of families and therefore not entitled to any land allotment, this reduced the number eligible for land from 10,000 to 6,000 and the land was drawn randomly by lot from the prairies not the river front. Legislation provided *scrip* for the eligible families that were approved in 1874. In 1876 the distribution of scrip began with much of it being surrendered to land speculators, for less than one-third the value because Métis were not allowed to exchange the scrip for land suitable for maintain their traditional lifestyle. The allotments of the 1.4 million acres for unmarried children of mixed parents were drawn arbitrarily in 240 acre sections from open prairie. The land was subject to local taxation from the moment of allotment even though the property owners were not to receive the property deeds until they turned 18 years of age, consequently only one third of the original owners still owned their land one year after the issuance. Many of the Métis who did attempt to settle on their homesteads were forced from their homes, due to violent harassment from the European settlers with no settlement given for their land.



SCRIP

There were two types of scrip issued to Métis people, 'land scrip' and 'money scrip'. Land scrip could be traded for land; money scrip could only be traded for money. Most of the Métis took the money scrip, whether because they did not want to become farmers or because they did not trust the government. The Métis people knew very well that with or without scrip their lands could be taken forcibly from them.



WESTWARD MOVEMENT

The Métis moved farther west in a continual effort to establish a permanent home base where they could live accordingly to traditional life. Several communities were built and these still exist, among them Cumberland house, Duck Lake, Petite Ville, St. Laurent and Batoche, in Saskatchewan. Well known communities in Alberta are Kikino, Fishing Lake (Sputno), Buffalo Lake, Paddle Prairie, Gift Lake, Peavine, East Prairie and Elizabeth.

This time the Métis ran afoul of the government's desire to build a railroad that would unite the east and west, an undertaking that was vital for continued European expansion. The government began a

concentrated effort to obtain possession of ever increasing amounts of land. The wholesale slaughter of the buffalo helped convince many Indian leaders that their only hope in survival of their people lay with the federal government and many signed treaties yielding for all time their claim to the land. The relationship between Métis and Ottawa had deteriorated due to continued refusal to recognize the abuses of Indian (first Nation and Métis) people and the economic crisis that existed in the Northwest Territories. The Métis people felt themselves to be voiceless in a corrupt and unfair system, this discontent was worsened by two large land grants given to the CPR by MacDonald government. Eventually the situation escalated and the second Riel rebellion occurred. The government used this to help the CPR gain more funds to complete the railroad in order to transport troops to end the rebellion.

The result was the defeat of the 350 Métis at the hands of 8,000 troops and the death of Riel. With Riel's death, the Métis fell silent and disempowered as they were driven landless and poverty struck the western provinces. In Saskatchewan the Métis became known as the "road allowance people" as many who had lost their homesteads had nowhere to establish new homes other than crown lands on the outskirts of towns and villages populated by European settlers. The law prevents the Métis from living on the reserves and the public prevents them from living in and being part of European settlements.

Laws were passed that forbid hunting and fishing, this caused increased hardships for the Métis as they now had no way to feed themselves and their families. The men looked for and found labour jobs on farms and ranches to supplement the trapping they could do in the winter months. Many Métis changed their names and denied their heritage in order to "fit in". Métis, who did not change their names, became scornful of those who did. For over two generations Métis people were humiliated, persecuted and denied the rights enjoyed by other Canadian citizens as well denied the rights allowed First Nations people. The Métis were ostracised socially by non aboriginals, and many turned to alcohol in an effort to escape the constant life of unemployment, rejection, malnutrition, disease and hunger that made up their existence.



Alberta is the only province to have set aside and kept the promise to establish Métis Colonies. This land however is in the northern third of the province, in a climate that discourages all but the hardiest people, with little incentive for economic prosperity or growth. There are eight remaining Métis colonies on Alberta out of the twelve that were originally granted, all of them located north of Edmonton.



METIS SYMBOLS

The Métis Sash – a finger woven belt made of wool, was about three yards long. Traditionally it was tied at the waist to hold a man's coat closed, additionally it was used as a rope, a carrying sack or a scarf. Now the sash is an important symbol of Métis people, worn by both men and women as well as by children. Métis women usually wore it over the right shoulder and tied at the left hip, men still wear it wrapped around their waist. The colors often symbolize: Red – the historical color for the Métis sash, Blue and White – the colors of the National Flag, Green – fertility, growth and prosperity and Black – the dark time of Métis people.



The Métis Flag - The METIS Flag is the first patriotic flag that is indigenous to Canada, this makes it the oldest truly Canadian flag to fly in this country. Other patriotic flags of the time included the French Fleur-de-lis which represented New France, now Quebec and the British Union Jack used in representation of British held territory and later the original flag flown by Canadians. Although these two flags were used in colonial Canada, they were first created and flown in Europe. The Metis flag as a symbol of nationhood of Metis people predates the Maple Leaf of Canada by approximately 150 years.

The Metis flag carries a horizontal figure 8 (eight) otherwise known as the infinity symbol. This symbol indicates the blending of two separate and unique cultures, that of Europe (the Old Country) and indigenous people of North America (First Nations) which created a dynamic and distinct new culture of people, the Metis. The flag represents symbolically the creation of a new society of people with equal beginnings in both European and Aboriginal traditions and culture. The Metis flag has long had two variations, both depict the infinity symbol in white, one variation uses a red background and the other uses a blue background.

The blue flag is apparently the most popular. There is no known reason as to why the original Metis people designed/flew two differently colored flag patterns. Speculation suggests that the blue background/white infinity symbol flag was created by employees of the North West Fur Trading Company, since these were the colors of that firm and it hired the most French and Michif speaking Metis. Other suggestions put forth the idea that the colors are also the original colors of French Canada or that the flag is very similar to the national flag of Scotland. It would be completely logical as the Scottish and French colonials were mostly hired by the North West Company and gave birth to the most Metis families. The flag was however distinctly Metis in origin and was recognized as such.

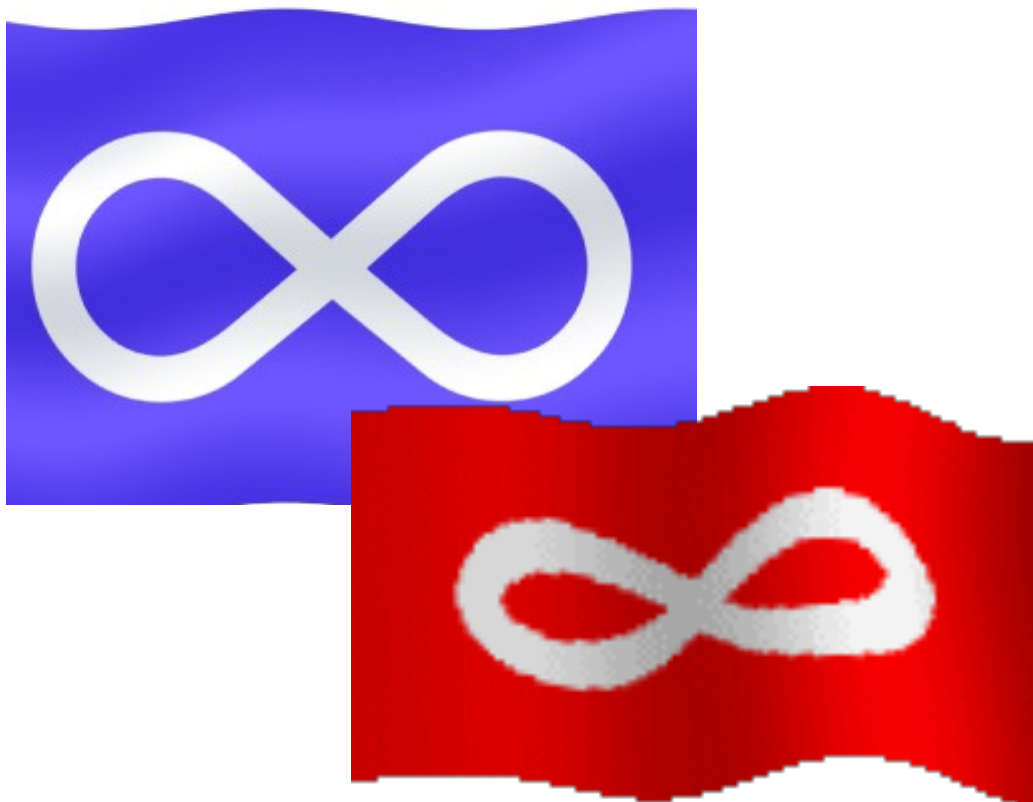
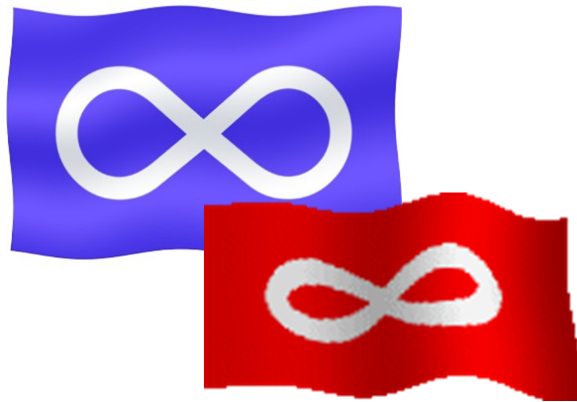
The red flag is slightly less common. It may have been created by employees of the Hudson Bay Fur Trading Company, which had red and white as its traditional colors. It may also have been influenced by the British colonials.

Neither variation of the flag were used by Metis people during the resistance movements of 1869-1870 nor 1885. Flags flown during this period contained both French - Canadian and Catholic symbols. The



reasons behind this are not known, simply it is acknowledged that for about sixty years or so, the Metis flags were not used and almost forgotten.

However, as Metis consciousness and pride re-emerged the flag also came back. Both flags are widely used throughout the Metis Nation of Canada today. It is a dynamic symbol of Metis traditions, historical heritage and pride.



MÉTIS in CURRENT TIMES


Some Métis people struggled successfully to keep their identity and they became the early leaders in the Métis Nation during the 1960's and 1970's. These people advocated strenuously for Métis rights and recognition which resulted in the formation and spread of provincial Métis Nation Associations, as government people with no knowledge or concept of Métis needs and desires, made decisions that would affect Métis lives.

There was slowly a growth of recognition for Métis rights by the Canadian Government. This recognition came about because of constant pressure from the Métis National Council, the MNC is the national voice of the Métis people. The Canadian Constitution of 1982 recognized the existing aboriginal and treaty rights of aboriginal people. It included the Métis people in the definition of aboriginal people. This was a big step. Hunting and harvesting rights have been recognized by the federal courts in 2003 a fact which has given legal, constitutional rights as well as political acceptance of Métis people s a distinct nation.

In Alberta the Métis nation of Alberta had strong coherence under the current President Audrey Poitras. Red Deer and south to the US border falls into the jurisdiction of Zone3, with Ephram Bouvier as Zone 3 President. (Ephram Bouvier past away while still holding office as Zone 3 President, 2011) New strategies are being undertaken to strengthen the Métis Nation, confirm heritage of Métis members and develop long term economic development to assist in making the Métis people a strong self reliant people again.

Social Services Initiatives in Alberta have for the last few years included Métis people, to aid this there are now Family and children services offered out of the main Métis nation offices in Edmonton and Calgary. Like the First Nation people, Métis people are beginning to be able to have a voice in where the





children are placed when apprehension is necessary, as well as in the services provided to help ensure family safety.

Cultural endeavours occur in the provinces as well. Here in Alberta there is the Hivernaut Rendezvous that occurs at Big Valley from July 29-31. Cultural events of games and skills, sharing of language, displaying and selling of arts and crafts, jigging and more can be found there. The Rendezvous had room for all people; those with modern day camping methods are accommodated while those desiring to take part in traditional camping of tipi or canvas tent are also showcased. The Métis crossing, a cultural and tourist endeavour, will also play an important part in the cultural renewal of Métis people. This area will provide cultural exhibits, activities and interpretations as well as meeting and camping spaces.


Métis people now have as active role in government at provincial and federal levels. They are recognized in health care, education, employment, social services and housing funding strategies. Métis people can now begin taking care of their own elders, children, youth and communities.

ADDRESSING VULNERABILITY ISSUES

Prior to the 1880s Métis people were industrious, valuable as intermediaries between European and Aboriginal cultures and highly active in the development of western Canada. But unlike the First Nations and the Inuit, the historic contributions and rights of the Métis were not acknowledged, nor was their inherent Aboriginal rights to land and self-government respected by either provincial or federal governments. Beginning in 1763, with the Royal Proclamation and continuing until the 1980s, Métis people continually struggled for justice, recognition and freedom. Throughout this time period, Métis people suffered from marginalization, poverty, racism and exclusion. Métis people were kept in “no man’s land” a limbo of existence between white and Aboriginal societies, shifting identity as necessary from situation to situation. The Berger inquiry was told: *“I don’t think that anyone, without having gone through the fire, can understand the feeling of being Métis. Belonging to both, but in reality to neither. Growing up in Fort Norman in the 1950’s I went through the fire. Whites and Indians accepting you on the surface, but rejecting you from the heart and soul. Imagine the feeling of a person being called a “Goddamned Half-Breed.” So for a while we did what we thought was a smart thing; when with the whites, we were white; when the Indian came, we became Indian, but this could only go on for so long without splitting ourselves apart trying to be two people.”* These comments were made by Rick Hardy, a former President of the Métis Association of the North West Territories. It is only since the mid 1990’s that Métis people have begun to have a voice in governmental issues such as women’s issues, health, housing, environment, justice, hunting and fishing.

Legitimate statistics, relevant to social determinants of health, incarceration and education are not yet available. This sad state of affairs is due to a multitude of reasons. First, systems in place for determining such statistics often do not request Métis identity and simply include any Aboriginal ancestry, which is not of First Nation status, under the umbrella ABORIGINAL. Second, many Métis people are still






reluctant to self-identify due to shame or stereotyping. Third, there remain a significant number of Métis people, who are unaware of their heritage due to adoptions, family breakdowns and various other concerns.

Important Dates for Alberta Métis

- 1928 First gathering at Frog Lake
- 1932 L'Association des Métis D;Alberta et des Territoires du Nord Ouest was formed
 - First Annual Convention held (St. Alberta, AB)
 - Abolishment of the term Half Breed, term Métis adopted
- 1938 Métis population Betterment Act creates 12 colonies or settlements
- 1939 Métis Soldiers fight in WWII
- 1961 Métis Association of Alberta began a court challenge against the province after Alberta refused to pay Métis royalties on oil and gas taken from Métis Settlements.
- 1970 Métis of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba developed a national voice through the creation of Native Council of Canada to focus on Métis interests.
- 1979 Stan Daniela emphasizes struggles of the Métis in Ottawa
- 1981 Métis established Métis National Council and demanded 2 seats at the Constitutional table This was finally received after Métis began court action against then Prime Minister Trudeau.
- 1982 Métis receive Constitutional recognition, Constitution Act of 1982 (section 91.24) In this Act “aboriginal peoples of Canada” included Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples
- 1983 Métis Urban Housing incorporated
- 1984 Reorganization of governing structures of Métis Nation
- 1985 Province of Alberta adopted Resolution 18 amending Alberta Act and Métis betterment Act
- 1987 Apeetogosan created (an economic development strategy)
 - Métis settlements resolve lawsuit that leads to Alberta Métis Settlements accord.
- 1987- First Framework agreement signed.
- 1990 Métis land claim settlements act is passed, Métis settlement accord is proclaimed
- 1991 Métis Association of Alberta is changed to Métis Nation of Alberta Association
- 1992 Charlottetown Accord of August 1992, affirmed the inherent right to self-government by the Métis and was signed by most of the Premiers.
- 1992 Tripartite Agreement signed between Canada/Alberta/Métis of Alberta which recognized a move toward self-government



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- 1993 Max Yalden, Human Rights Commissioner, wrote his Annual Report which was tabled in Parliament, March 17, 1994. He said that Canada's treatment of native people remains Canada's worst human rights abuse.
 - 1997 Provincial Head office housed in Delia Gray building
 - 1999 Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy
 - 200 Provincial government delegates child and family services authority in the 8 Métis settlements
 - 2001 Victoria Landing acquired, Métis crossing site
 - 2003 Louis Riel Bill C- 288 passed in Parliament
Powley decision from Supreme Court of Canada
Federal Government commits to renewing Aboriginal Human Resources Strategy

Resource Material/ Recommended Reading

Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View, Howard Adams

Métis Legacy: A Métis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography, Lawrence Barkwell

The New People: Being and Becoming Métis in North America, Jacqueline Peterson & Jennifer Brown

The Métis People of Canada: A History, D.R. Anderson

The Métis: Canada's Forgotten People, Bruce Sealey

Halfbreed, Maria Campbell

Métis, Glenbow Museum







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