

Stepping Stones



MÉTIS NATION OF ALBERTA

Planning your learning journey

Who are the Métis and how did the Métis Nation of Alberta come to be?



Glenbow Archives PA-2218-109

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Group portrait of the Provincial Executive Committee, Alberta Métis Association, Edmonton, Alberta March 1935

Front row, L-R: Malcolm Frederick Norris, Joseph Francis Dion, James Patrick Brady.

Back row, L-R: Peter Cecil Tomkins, Felix Callihoo.

FIRST STEPS



Métis historic communities and their distinct culture were established during the fur trade prior to the Rupert's Land territory becoming part of Canada.¹ The Métis are one of the three distinct Aboriginal² peoples of Canada recognized in the 1982 Canadian Constitution. Many Canadians have mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry but are not Métis, or despite having the lived experience, do not identify as Métis. Métis in Alberta are Indigenous people who self-identify as Métis, have a shared kinship through a historic community and have formed a distinct culture that includes their own customs, traditions, Michif language³ and relationships to the land. Métis are culturally distinct from other Indigenous people.





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THE FUR TRADE AND RESISTANCE

The Métis played a crucial role in the development and success of the fur trade throughout the North-West.⁴ As European fur traders moved into the Rupert's Land (North-West) territory,⁵ some entered into “country marriages” with First Nations women and had children with them. Over time, these children and their following generations developed a distinct culture, language and identity, established communities along fur trade routes and flourished as entrepreneurs and prominent fur trade intermediaries between First Nations and Europeans along locations that include Fort Chipewyan (c 1778), Fort Vermilion (c 1779), Lac La Biche Mission (c 1785) and Fort Augustus (Edmonton House) (c 1795). Eventually a political consciousness and sense of nationhood developed and congealed from these early settlements.⁶

Louis Riel,⁷ leader of the 1869 Métis Red River Resistance in present day Manitoba, joined forces with Gabriel Dumont,⁸ president of the South Saskatchewan River Métis, to fight for Métis land rights in what is now Saskatchewan and Alberta in the North-West Resistance that culminated at Batoche⁹ in 1885. After a four-day battle, the better equipped Canadian militia defeated the Métis forces. Riel surrendered, was tried for treason by the Canadian government, and was convicted and executed on November 16, 1885.¹⁰

SCRIP

Scrip was a policy of the Canadian government to deal with Métis land title. “Half-breed” scrip, as it was officially known, was granted to those Métis who met the criteria set out by the Government of Canada. It was issued in the form of a certificate valued at either 160 or 240 acres of land and/or an equal dollar amount. Throughout this convoluted scrip process, there was widespread fraud committed by scrip speculators and only a handful of Métis actually received scrip. In the early 1920s, Canada's Senate changed the *Criminal Code* to effectively decriminalize this fraudulent activity. This sparked outrage among the Métis, some of whom became politically active as a result.¹¹

ADVOCATE FOR LAND RIGHTS

Métis in Alberta began to organize politically in the 1920s. In 1928, a small group of Métis under the leadership of Charles Delorme met near Cold Lake. This started the first political movement here in Alberta for the Métis. In the 1930s, the Métis Association of Alberta (MAA) was established to advocate for the land rights of Métis in Alberta. They successfully lobbied the provincial government to establish the Ewing Commission to examine the social and economic issues of the Métis. This led to the establishment of 12 Métis settlements in Alberta, under the *Métis Population Betterment Act* of 1938.¹² The Métis Association of Alberta became the Métis Nation of Alberta in 1991.¹³ The 12 settlements were reduced to 8 by the Alberta Government and became the Federation of Métis Settlements and in 1990, the Métis Settlements General Council.¹⁴

Rupert's Land Map

Indigenous and European relations in the fur trade economy of the historic Northwest (1670–1870) produced the *bois-brûlé*, who were a formidable force of hunters and fur traders who engaged business with the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company. Over time the *bois-brûlé* developed kinship with a distinct cultural, political and collective identity which led to their open declaration that they were the Métis Nation. Led by Cuthbert Grant, their long-standing dispute with Lord Selkirk and encroaching settlers at the Red River Settlement gave immediate entry into the political arena over Métis land rights ending in the Battle of the Frog Plain in 1816 (commonly known as the Battle of Seven Oaks).

After 1821, the diminishing fur trade transitioned some Métis into buffalo hunters supplying buffalo hides and pemmican to the Hudson's Bay Company while they explored



Rupertsland Institute, Métis Centre of Excellence
www.rupertsland.org/metis-homeland/

entrepreneurial skills and trade experience outside the boundaries of Rupert's Land territory including parts of (northern) United States. The freedom and mobility of the Métis Nation expands its traditional territory beyond the Rocky Mountain watershed and makes it difficult to illustrate an agreed map depicting the Métis Nation Homeland beyond Rupert's Land boundaries.

For greater certainty, the homeland of the Métis Nation extends beyond the illustration of Rupert's Land boundaries (please refer to www.rupertsland.org/metis-homeland/ for further information).

MÉTIS NATION OF ALBERTA

The Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA)¹⁵ represents all Métis in Alberta and works to advance the socioeconomic and cultural well-being of the citizens they represent. The Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) comprises six regions across the province, each with a regional office. The provincial office is located in Edmonton.

- Region 1–Lac La Biche
- Region 2–Bonnyville
- Region 3–Calgary
- Region 4–Edmonton
- Region 5–Slave Lake
- Region 6–Peace River¹⁶

The Métis Nation of Alberta is governed by the Provincial Council, which consists of a provincial president, a provincial vice-president, and six regional presidents and vice-presidents, for a total of 14 members.¹⁷

The Métis Nation of Alberta offers many programs and services to its citizens in the areas of health and social well-being. Affiliates of the Métis Nation of Alberta were created and mandated to deliver specific programs and services. For example, Apeetogosan (Métis) Development¹⁸ provides support to citizens seeking entrepreneurial supports or business development; Rupertsland Institute delivers education, training and research supports; and Métis Crossing focuses on culture and tourism.¹⁹

In order to become a citizen of the Métis Nation of Alberta, individuals must provide documentation to the Métis Nation of Alberta Registry that meets the requirements of the national definition of Métis. One of which is a completed family tree that clearly outlines Métis ancestral connection to the Métis Homeland of the historic North-West.²⁰

MÉTIS IN CANADA

Section 35 of the *Constitution Act 1982* defines “aboriginal peoples of Canada” as “Indian, Inuit and Métis.” This section also recognizes and affirms “existing Aboriginal and treaty rights.”²¹

The *Powley* decision (2003) was a case brought to the Supreme Court of Canada when two Métis brothers harvested a moose and were charged with illegal hunting. They pled not guilty and asserted their right to hunt for food under Section 35.²² The Supreme Court sided with the brothers and the case outlined what has now become Métis harvesting rights in Canada (*Powley Test*).²³

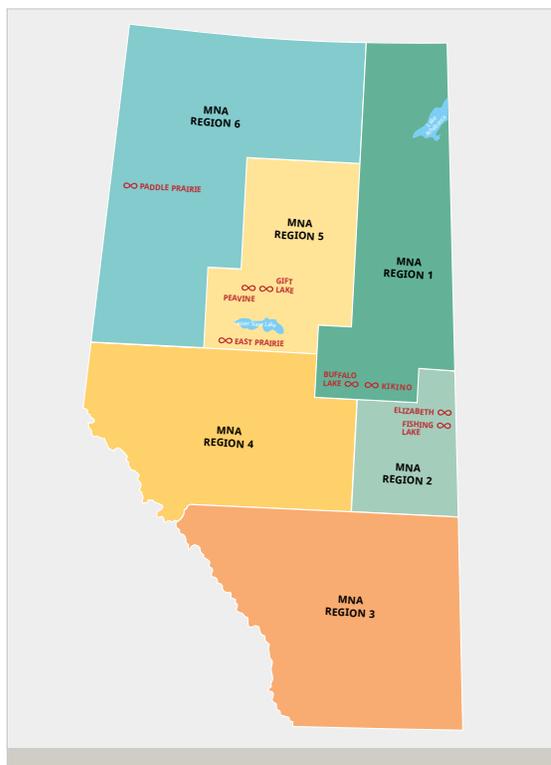
The *Daniels* decision (SCC 2016) concluded that Métis and nonstatus Indians are “Indians” for the purposes of Section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act* (1867).²⁴ The practical implications of the *Daniels* decision remain to be seen, but experts agree that it is a landmark decision.²⁵

On June 27, 2019, the Métis Nation of Alberta signed the historic Métis government recognition and self-government agreement with the Government of Canada. Since then, the Métis Nation of Alberta along with the Métis Nation of Ontario and Métis Nation Saskatchewan have been working diligently on constitutions that will eventually lead to a fully operational self-government. This will be the largest of its kind in Canada.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MÉTIS CROSSING INTERPRETIVE CENTRE. USED WITH PERMISSION.

Métis Crossing, the first major Métis cultural interpretive centre in Alberta.



Alberta Métis settlements and Métis Nation of Alberta political regions.

NEXT STEPS



Nearly 37,000 Métis are registered as citizens of the Métis Nation of Alberta,²⁶ and in the 2016 census over 114,000 Albertans self-identified as Métis.²⁷ Given the significant population of Métis in Alberta, it is incumbent upon educators to develop an understanding of the unique history, culture and experiences of the Métis. The journey of reconciliation is inclusive of all three Indigenous groups: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. By developing a deeper understanding of the Métis in Alberta, educators are taking one more step along the journey of reconciliation.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RUPERTSLAND INSTITUTE, MÉTIS CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE. USED WITH PERMISSION.

Red river cart.

Continuing Your Learning Journey

a) *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action seek to eliminate the education gap for all First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. How can classroom teachers support this call to action?*

b) *What recent agreements and accords are impacting and advancing Métis citizens in Canada (scrip, lack of Indigenous rights and recognition, residential schools)?*

NOTES

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Stepping Stones is a publication of the Alberta Teachers’ Association **Walking Together Project** intended to support certificated teachers on their learning journey to meet the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Foundational Knowledge competency in the Teaching Quality Standard.

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For additional resources and information on Walking Together, visit www.teachers.ab.ca.

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Walking Together

EDUCATION FOR RECONCILIATION

