

# THE MÉTIS FLAG



History shows that the Métis Flag was first introduced in the early 1800s, in and around 1815 to 1816. The Métis flag was first presented in 1815 and was later flown by Cuthbert Grant during the Battle of Frog Plain (also known as the Battle of Seven Oaks), making it the oldest patriotic flag Indigenous to Canada, predating the Canadian flag by 150 years.

The flag itself is a deep sky blue or red colour and bears a white infinity symbol. The infinity represents the coming together of two vibrant cultures, European and First Nation, to produce a new distinct culture, the Métis.

“Our flag represents the faith that the Métis culture shall live on forever. We are Indigenous to this country because we were born of the land long before Canada was a country.”

– Audrey Poitras, President,  
Métis Nation of Alberta



# BEADWORK & EMBROIDERY

Beading is one of the most recognized and celebrated Métis traditions.

Once they were available through trade, beads quickly became a part of the artistry of Métis women. By the 1850s, beads had become a primary medium of artistry and decoration for Métis women, from young girls to great-great-grandmothers. The Métis were called the “flower beadwork people” - this name references the distinct tradition of floral beadwork in Métis communities across the Homeland. Métis beadwork has decorated clothing, personal items, and more, and were used and worn by both Métis men and women for generations.

The Métis were also known for their floral embroidery. Embroidery is the creation of decorative artwork using silk or cotton threads. Métis women often preferred embroidering with silk thread because it was shiny and very useful in creating intricate designs. Métis embroidery was used to decorate clothing, personal, and household items. Some designs are linked to Métis families as far back as the 1800s. Some of the earliest embroidered designs also included quillwork.



# MÉTIS FIDDLE



The Métis are well known for their ability to fiddle an exciting tune with a quick beat. Traditionally fiddling was a male activity, but today all Métis are learning to play the fiddle. Similar to the culture of storytelling, fiddle songs and tunes often have personal meanings to their creator and their creator's family. Traditionally, fiddle tunes would not be written down; they were passed down in person from one generation of fiddlers to the next, as stories are.

"...this is my own way I see it. Métis fiddling is from the heart and there is a lot of feeling when it comes to that part for me, is that when I play from here and if I was reading from, thinking from the notebook, I would be too busy looking at the notebook trying to be perfect on my notes and forgetting my music, losing the feel for the music, so my music would not flow, it would become choppy."

– Homer Poitras, Métis Fiddler



# MÉTIS SASH

The Métis sash is one of the most recognizable symbols of Métis culture and identity. The sash is a hand-woven wool belt which is made in various lengths. Its fringed ends are both decorative and functional. Originally the sash was worn by men around their waists, tied either on the side or in front, as a belt.

Today, the traditional guidelines for wearing the sash vary among Métis communities. Some Métis believe that because historically only men wore the sash, it should, in keeping with tradition, continue to remain a men's clothing item, but today many Métis women also wear the sash. The sash was worn as an accessory, but also was a tool with a variety of uses. Here are some examples:



- ∞ as a scarf or belt
- ∞ as a rope to pull canoes
- ∞ for holding items, such as a hunting knife or fire bag
- ∞ as a washcloth or towel
- ∞ as a tourniquet for injuries
- ∞ as a bridle/saddle blanket
- ∞ as a sewing kit
- ∞ to mark buffalo as property after it was killed
- ∞ as a tumpline



# RED RIVER CART



The Red River cart is one of the most recognizable symbols of Métis culture and nationhood. It served multiple purposes and was a primary method of transportation for the Métis. The entire Red River cart was constructed of wood, which was fastened together with sinew and/or rope.

Its versatility was unlike any other cart of the time. The carts were easy to repair, as the construction materials, such as wood from trees or sinew from a hunt, were readily accessible. Another advantage of the Red River cart was that, because wood floats, they could travel across deep water with ease. Many older Métis remember how the loud squealing noise created by the unlubricated axles could be heard for miles.

The carts were used to transport trade goods and were essential to the booming fur trade business. Before the railway was built, it was the Métis with their sturdy, dependable Red River carts who transported heavy bison furs for hundreds of miles. The carts were also used in resistance efforts, for transport, protection, and shelter during travel.



# RED RIVER JIG

The most traditional Métis dance is the Red River Jig, created by the Métis over a century ago. This famous dance predates the creation of Manitoba and is performed to the beat of the Red River Jig fiddle tune. The dance is taught and shared among Métis kinships, with individual Métis communities often adding their own fancy steps. It is a fascinating dance to both watch and participate in. Red River Jig competitions happen today across Canada. The objective of these competitions is to attain perfect shuffling in a variety of steps, with as little upper body movement as possible.

Other Métis dances include the Duck Dance, the Broom Dance, and the Sash Dance. The traditional Métis jig has been passed down over generations and has survived numerous periods of cultural suppression. Métis dances truly express the stamina of the community, and its ability to endure and celebrate life even during difficult times.



# TRADITIONAL CUISINE



Many Canadians believe Métis traditional food is limited to bison, pemmican, and bannock. This is not the case. Métis culinary skills are creative, and there is a lot of variety in Métis dishes. Celebrations especially feature a diverse spread of delicious food. Gathering to share food brings the community together. Whether canning, drying meats and fish, or using fresh ingredients food preparation is a special part of Métis family life and a time of bonding.

Métis people believe that sharing what you have is an important value and this is expressed in their culinary culture. Many meals include fresh-baked bannock which is often devoured quickly. Many say it tastes best with butter and homemade saskatoon berry jam. Métis families often prepare wild meat, and when a family has extra meat it is traditional, even today, to share it with the wider community—especially with those in need.

