

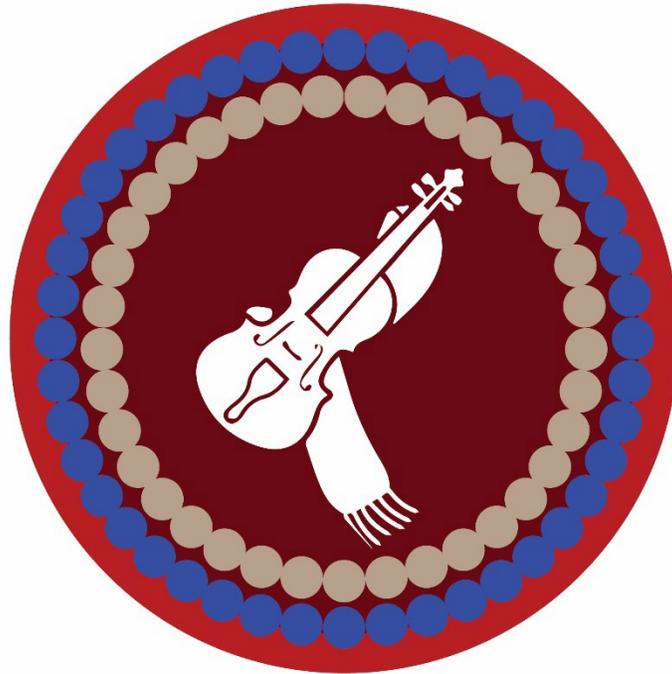


Métis Culture & Traditions

Foundational
Knowledge
Theme



A publication of Rupertsland Institute



Métis Culture & Traditions

Métis Foundational Knowledge Theme



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Languages of Métis

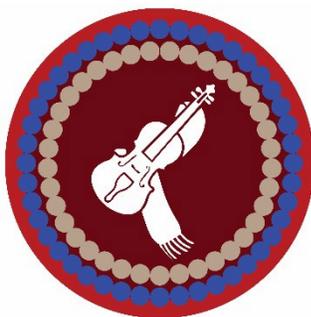
Métis Culture & Traditions

Homeland History

Métis in Alberta

Métis Nation Governance

Introduction to Métis Culture & Traditions



This theme is a guide that will highlight some key features of Métis culture and traditions, which, in the context used here, refer to the values, customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of Métis communities. Culture and traditions are woven within the characteristics of the everyday lives of the Métis, which will be revealed throughout this resource.



All RCTL resources have been carefully developed by RLI's team of Métis educators.

From 2018 - 2021, RLI worked closely with Métis leaders, knowledge keepers, and community members to produce five Foundational Knowledge Themes to support educators as they grow in their understanding of authentic Métis history, stories, and perspectives.

The Foundational Knowledge Themes are a set of living documents.

RCTL will provide periodic updates to the document to ensure that Métis voices and stories are represented in the most accurate way.

Please ensure you are referring to the most current version.

*If you have something you would like considered for contribution or have feedback,
please contact education@rupertsland.org*



Rupertsland Institute (RI) is an affiliate of the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) and is incorporated as a not-for-profit organization under the Alberta Companies Act. The Métis Nation of Alberta assigned RLI mandates in education, training, and research.



Rupertsland Centre for Teaching and Learning (RCTL) was established in 2018 under RLI's Education mandate. The Education Team at RCTL develops Métis-centric comprehensive foundational knowledge resources, engaging lesson plans, meaningful professional development opportunities and authentic classroom learning tools that support all learners in all levels of education.

In particular, RCTL is committed to empowering educators to develop and apply foundational knowledge about Métis for the benefit of all students, as outlined in Alberta Education's [Leadership Quality Standard \(LQS\)](#) and Competency #5 of the [Teaching Quality Standard \(TQS\)](#).

All RCTL resources have been carefully crafted by RLI's team of Métis educators. RLI works closely with Métis leaders, knowledge keepers, and community members to produce resources that accurately present authentic Métis voices and stories in education. The staff at Rupertsland Institute are honoured that members of the Métis Nation in Alberta have determined RLI to be a trustworthy voice to share Métis stories in a meaningful, respectful way.

With support from many Métis and non-Métis educators, students, and others, the three leaders from Rupertsland Institute's K-12 Education Team have been primary contributors to the development of the Foundational Knowledge Themes.

Visit our website for more information, classroom resources, and more:

<http://www.rupertsland.org/teaching-learning/>

Contact Us:

Rupertsland Centre for Teaching and Learning
2300, 10123 – 99 Street
Edmonton, AB T5J 3H1

education@rupertsland.org



Lisa Cruickshank

Lisa is a proud member of the Métis Nation of Alberta. Lisa has worked in the K-12 system for 20 years in various capacities such as Elementary Educator, Indigenous Education Consultant, Provincial Curriculum Development, and is currently the Director for Métis Education and Lifelong learning at Rupertsland Institute. Lisa is passionate and committed to advancing Métis education across the province and building capacity with Métis educators.



Billie-Jo Grant

Billie-Jo Grant is a strong Métis mother, educator, and leader who inspires others to have tough conversations and learn more to do better for ALL students. Her goal is to ensure that authentic Métis education is commonplace to guarantee that Métis are no longer the "forgotten people."



Kimberley Fraser-Airhart

Kimberley is a Métis woman from amiskwaciy-wâskahikan (Edmonton, AB). In Spring 2018, she began working with RLI as a primary author of the Foundational Knowledge Themes. Guided by stories and wisdom from her Métis community, Kimberley is passionate about addressing systemic injustices so that all students can see themselves in their education.



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Published in loving memory of Cecil Bellrose, a beloved father, grandfather, great-grandfather, husband, brother, and uncle in the Métis Nation. His legacy of leadership, kindness, and pride will not be forgotten.



A Letter from Alberta Métis Education Council

The publication of these themes for Métis education is the culmination of years of collaboration between the brilliant educators at Rupertsland Institute for Métis Excellence, the Alberta Métis Education Council (AMEC), and the Métis people of this province. We, the members of AMEC, are writing this letter to share with you our joy at the release of these materials. To help you understand, we need to share a little story...



It was a dream come true. In a few short years, the line item on a strategic work plan for the first-ever Associate Director, Métis Education, calling for a collective voice in Métis education had become a reality. Thanks to visionary leadership from Lorne Gladu, our CEO at Rupertsland Institute, the first advisory members were now seated around a conference table. The jagged mountain view out the Banff Centre windows was breathtaking yet the vision that was unfolding at the first meeting of the Alberta Métis Education Council was just as impressive. Over the next five years, this new council would meet regularly to carry out the urgent business of advocating for Métis education in Alberta. We met in different locations around the province, reinforcing the importance of place and honouring our diversity across the province. Our Council welcomed Ms. Betty Letendre, a well-respected *keytayak* (say: kay-tah-yahk) from the Edmonton region, who offered her thoughtful guidance on how to honour our people through spiritual and cultural traditions passed on from our ancestors. As we met in these places, feeling the traces of our ancestors and land's memory, we knew that it was now our responsibility to revitalize our history and our stories through our roles as Métis educators. With our vision of self-determination guiding us, our group emerged with a set of themes representing what we felt was important for others to know about us as Métis people living in Alberta.

This kind of intellectual sovereignty is a reflection of our ability to govern ourselves and to set out the priorities for our people. In saying so, we hearken back to one of the names for the Métis People, *otipemisiwak*, which means those who govern themselves. The work that is done in these themes begins with Métis ways of knowing, being, and doing as a foundation. Shaping resources and materials for educators, in partnership to build better understandings of the Métis in this province, is an undertaking that moves together with building healthy futures for Métis People in this province.

In looking back at how our vision of Métis education came to be, our insistence that Métis people will determine our vision of Métis education through our collective efforts and talents has remained our guiding vision. In respecting our traditional ways, we honour our ancestors; in respecting our present circumstances, we honour our resilience; and in respecting our educational efforts, we honour our future generations.

It is our tremendous honour to witness the fruition of this dream.

Alberta Métis Education Council

Preston Huppie (MEd), Council Chair: Indigenous Education/Learning Leader, Calgary Board of Education

Dr. Yvonne Poitras Pratt (PhD): Professor, University of Calgary

Dr. Cindy Swanson (PhD): Teacher, Edmonton Public Schools

Kimberley Brown (MEd): Online Teacher, North Star Academy

Dr. Aubrey Hanson (PhD): Professor, University of Calgary

Erin Reid (MEd): Indigenous Literacy Consultant, Edmonton Catholic Schools

Adam Browning (PhD candidate): Director of Learning, Palliser Regional Schools



Letter of Support from Métis Nation of Alberta

Dear Fellow Education Partners,

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter to support Rupertsland Institute's (RLI) publication of Foundational Knowledge Themes from the Education Division. I would like to thank the RLI Education Team for its vision in putting together a publication of Foundational Knowledge Themes to advance Métis Education in Alberta. These themes encompass the elements of "UNDRIP" and moving towards fruition under articles 14 & 15 whereas: **"Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information (15)."** In addition, this work reflects the *Calls to Action* #62, where **"We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to ... create age-appropriate curriculum on [...] Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada."** Through the sharing of accurate Métis historical and contemporary stories within these themes, the Métis Nation of Alberta is supported in its institutional capacity toward self-government.

Most importantly, I see the value of informing and teachers and all educators about the Métis Nation and how education is critical to reconciliation. It is our desire that Métis citizens and all people finally learn about the rightful place of the Métis Nation and its role in Canadian history. With the implementation of Métis Education in Alberta, our Métis children understand their distinct culture and history, and the key role that the Métis people have played in the development of Canada. I am very proud of Rupertsland Centre for Teaching and Learning and its role in developing comprehensive Métis authentic education lesson plans with engaging resources for all learners in Alberta. Métis history and heritage play a large role in the history of Canada, and it is important that all learners have access and benefit from Métis education.

Since, acquiring the K-12 mandate in 2012, RLI has had huge success under the *MNA-GOA Framework Agreement*. RLI has also demonstrated effective and accountable governance and positive productive relationships, which are two key business plan goals of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

I am very thankful to the large group of knowledge keepers including past and current MNA Provincial Council members, and senior Métis Nation staff that have taken such a huge interest and have passionately shared their extensive knowledge to ensure that the five foundational knowledge themes are accurate.

These themes will have a positive impact on all teachers' pedagogical approaches to incorporating Métis education in their classrooms. Métis students will see themselves in their school settings and the classroom and learn the true history from the Métis perspective of historical and contemporary events. Most importantly Métis learners will identify with the strength of their Nation, and this will serve to enhance their sense of identity and will support pride in who they are and where they come from.

Sincerely,


President Audrey Poitras





Acknowledgements

The Métis Nation of Alberta is an Indigenous organization that passionately serves and cares for its people. The creation of these resources would not have been possible without the incredible support from many determined scholars, leaders, educators, and community members who are committed to seeing a strong, positive future for the Métis Nation. They are committed to ensuring that the Métis story is told accurately so that their children can live free, empowered futures as Métis Nation citizens.

The dedication and tenacious vision of the **Alberta Métis Education Council** led to the establishment of this project.

Marsee

(say: mar-see)

kininanaskomitinawaw

(say: ki-na-na-skohm-tih-nah-wow)

The Education Team at RCTL would like to thank the Rupertsland Institute Executive Team, its many supportive and encouraging colleagues, and the skilled RCTL staff that contributed through 2019, 2020, and 2021: **Jerome Chabot, Christina Hardie, Kate Gillis, Julia Callioux, Rylee Sargeant, Michelle Bowditch, Jillian Ekeberg, Kendell Semotiuk, Colette Tardif, and Sonia Houle.**

Project development has been graciously supported by the affiliates of MNA. RLI thanks **Métis Crossing** and **Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research** for their support.

Thank You

It has been an honor to work closely with the **Provincial Archives of Alberta, the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, Fort Vermillion Heritage Society, Lac La Biche Historical Society, the Archives of Manitoba, the Glenbow Archives, and the Musée Heritage Museum** throughout the development of this project. Partnering with them to locate and share the stories of the Métis community that are in their care has been instrumental in telling the Métis story. RLI also thanks Kel Pero and her team at KMP and Associates for their editing services.

Several leaders and community members from the **Métis Nation of Alberta** have strengthened this project in innumerable ways. RLI received support, research material, unique insights, and a variety of resources from many who work for the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Marsee nititwan

(say: mar-see nih-tih-twahn)

This resource has been developed in close partnership with experienced leaders who have served the Métis Nation throughout their entire lives. Our team is beyond grateful for the knowledge, wisdom, and resilient passion that the **Theme Review Group** has invested in this project.

President Audrey Poitras
Vice-President Daniel Cardinal
Brenda Bourque-Stratichuk
Karen Collins
Bev New
Cecil Bellrose
Marilyn Lizee
Norma Spicer



Merci

(say: mayr-see)

There have been many community members who have supported the development of this project by sharing insights, stories, photos, ideas, connections, and more with RCTL. They have shared their stories in a variety of publications, videos, and resources that have been essential in developing these Themes. The list of contributors below is in special thanks to those who shared their time and efforts to support educators in Alberta, and ultimately, Métis students.

Languages of Métis

Brenda Bourque-Stratichuk; Daniel Cardinal; Dorothy Thunder; Jerome Chabot; Les Skinner; and Lorne Gladu.

Métis Culture & Traditions

Audrey Poitras; Bev New; Billie-Jo Grant; Brianna Lizotte; Connie Kulhavy; Gabriel Daniels; Jerome Chabot; Karen Collins; Kimberley Fraser-Airhart; Lilyrose Meyers; Lisa Cruickshank; Marilyn née Wells, Unterschultz/Lizee; Melissa Laboucane; Norma Spicer; Paul Gareau; Stephen Gladue; Terry Boucher; and Walter Andreef.

Homeland History

Billyjo DeLaRonde; Jason Mckay (Métis Nation-Saskatchewan); Marilyn née Wells, Unterschultz/Lizee; Métis Nation Ontario; and Shannon Dunfield. As primary academic sources for this document, the Education Team would like to extend a special thanks to Adam Gaudry and Jean Teillet for their scholarship in Métis history.

Métis in Alberta

Bailey Oster; Billie-Jo Grant; Bev New; Brenda Bourque-Stratichuk; Bryan Fayant; Norma Spicer; Christina Hardie; Cindy Ziorio; Colette Poitras; Daniel Cardinal; Emile and Edna Blyan; Emma Grant; Doreen Bergum; Jason Ekeberg; Jillian Ekeberg; Joshua Morin; Karen Collins; Kate Gillis; Kelly Johnston; Kimberley Fraser-Airhart; Kisha Supernant; Linda Boudreau-Semaganis; Lizotte Napew; Lorne Gladu; Molly Swain; Norma Collins; Paul Bercier; Rylee Sargeant; Sharon Morin; Shari Strachan; Theo Peters; and Yvonne Poitras-Pratt.

Métis Nation Governance

Daniel Cardinal; Gabriel Daniels; Lorne Gladu; Marilyn née Wells, Unterschultz/Lizee; Mary Wells; and Zachary Davis. As primary academic sources for this document, the Education Team would like to extend a special thanks to Adam Gaudry, Jean Teillet and Joe Sawchuk for their scholarship in Métis history and governance.



Who are the Métis?

Métis are a strong, Indigenous people who celebrate distinct kinship, traditions, languages, culture, politics, governance, and history. Métis are a collective of communities with a common sense of origin and destiny with kinship networks that span a historic homeland.¹ They share a common Métis nationalism that is distinct from other local identities.

Métis history begins with an ethnogenesis or emergence as a people and a Nation with a distinct ethnicity. Métis ethnicity has historical and ancestral connections to both First Nations and European relations. The unions between these two communities formed the first roots towards Métis nationhood. As communities of Métis people developed unique ways of being, doing, and knowing for themselves, they came together as a Métis Nation.

Understanding ethnogenesis as the origin of the Métis serves to counter the idea that Métis inherently means “mixed.” It is important that educators not reduce Métis identity to mixedness. Métis ethnogenesis acknowledges the beginnings of First Nations and European ancestors coming together, but also that by the mid-1700s the Métis had already developed into a distinct community with their own culture, traditions, and language.

Today Métis celebrate not just their historical roots and ethnogenesis, but also their distinct history, thriving peoplehood and vibrant culture. RCTL's Foundational Knowledge Resources invites educators to understand and celebrate Métis spirit, history, and culture, and their resilience as a people and a Nation.

Terminology to Consider...

Aboriginal

A legal term identifying the individuals and communities who were the original inhabitants to lands that became Canada.

Bois-Brule (say: bwah broo-lay)

This term is from the French language and translates literally to “burnt wood.” While originally the term had been used as a racially biased term, especially from the 18th to the 20th centuries, to refer to the diverse shades of skin color of Métis, it has been reclaimed by generations of Métis.

FNMI

An acronym often used to refer to the inclusion of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives in a dialogue or in writing. This misleading reference erases the distinctions of each Aboriginal group and so is considered offensive by many.

Half-Breed

A racially biased and derogatory term used, especially in the early 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, to refer to people of mixed heritage, often describing their Indigenous and European ancestries.



Indian

A term introduced by Euro-Canadian settlers to refer to people and communities that have ancestral connection to the lands of North, Central, and South America – especially those in North America. In Canada today, 'Indian' remains a legal term, referencing First Nations people under the *Constitution Act* and *Indian Act*.

Indigenous

A recent term describing the identity, culture, or heritage of anyone whose ancestors traditionally occupied a territory that has been colonized. There are three groups of Indigenous peoples in Canada: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. This term is better understood in Canada with the endorsement of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) in 2010.

Métis

This term has origins in the French language, translating to English as "mixed." During the ethnogenesis of the Métis Nation, the term Métis was used to describe the children of First Nations peoples and Euro-Canadian settlers. The generations who led the development of the Métis Nation reclaimed the term as a name for themselves. Today the term Métis properly refers to those who self-identify as Métis, are distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, are of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, and who are accepted by the Métis Nation.

Michif

A term used by the Métis to identify themselves as Indigenous people. The term is also the name of the distinct Indigenous language spoken by Métis.

Native

This term is used to associate someone or something with the place or circumstance of their origin. Some use it to refer to Aboriginal identity, but it does not account for distinct heritage, culture, or nationhood.

Otipemisiwak (say: oh-tih-pem-soo-wuk)

Another way of referencing Métis. The term is from the Cree language. It expresses the idea that the Métis lead, govern, care for, and own themselves. This was the name that the Cree kin of the Métis dedicated to them. Otipemisiwak is not fully understood in one English term or expression.

Pan-Indigenous

A way of referencing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit together as if they are one big group or Nation.



What is the Métis Homeland?

The Métis Nation has a generational Homeland that includes much of present-day Western Canada and northern sections of the United States. The specific areas include what is today: parts of southern Northwest Territories; parts of Ontario; Manitoba; Saskatchewan; Alberta; parts of British Columbia; parts of northern Montana; parts of North Dakota; and parts of Minnesota, USA.² Métis ancestry, history, culture, and languages are rooted in these lands.

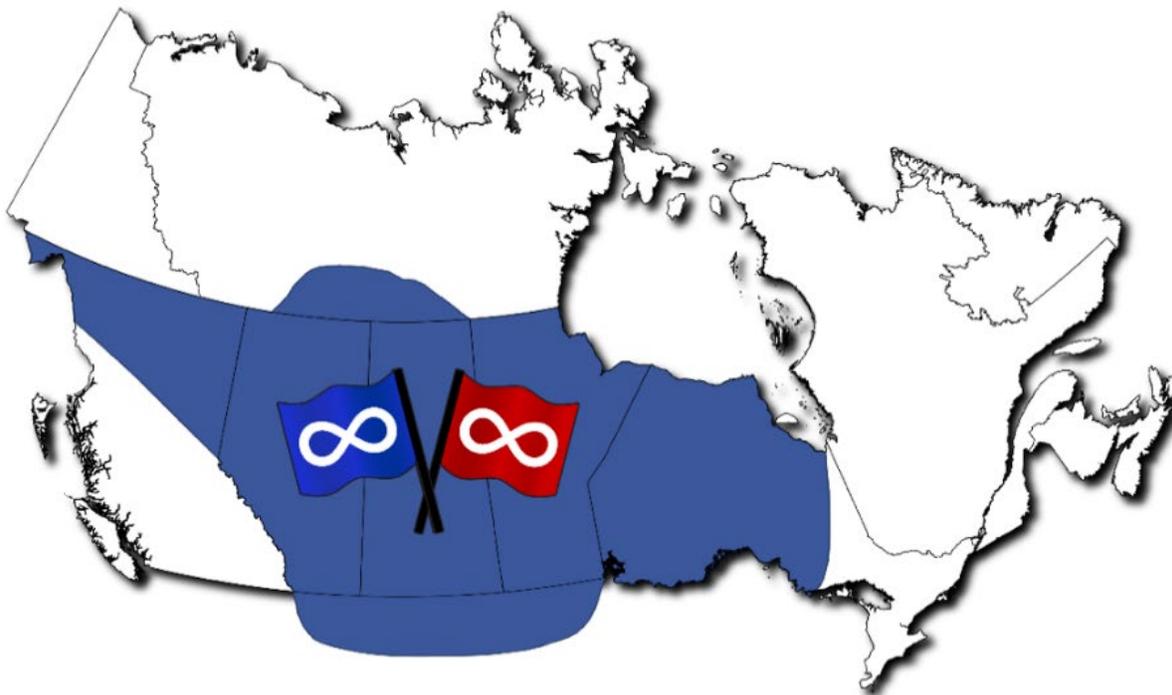


Figure 1 Métis Nation Homeland in Canada. Photo courtesy of the Métis Nation of Alberta, 2021.



Métis Culture and Traditions Vocabulary List

Term	Definition
Aboriginal	Descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The peoples in Canada, according to Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution, 1982, are inclusive of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Each group is distinct and has its own history, culture, protocols, traditions, and languages. Used as a term when referring to government documents.
Adaptability	The ability to adjust to different conditions or circumstances. People who are adaptable are open and willing to try new things.
Ancestor	A descendant in one's family lineage beyond grandparents.
Annual General Assembly (AGA)	Annual gathering where leaders of the Métis Nation of Alberta and its affiliates report to the citizens on the achievements of that year, as well as to receive direction. It is also a time of celebration and participating in many cultural activities and events. Also called the Annual Assembly or Annual General Meeting.
Back to Batoche Days	A four-day festival in Batoche, Saskatchewan commemorating Métis resistance of 1885 and showcasing Métis culture and traditions.
Bangs	Fried bread dough.
Bannock	Made from flour, salt, baking powder, oil, water. Bannock can be baked, fried, or over open flame. Check out the Rupertsland lesson plan "B is for Bannock" to make your own and learn more about this Métis tradition.
Battle of Seven Oaks	On June 9, 1816, this battle was the first time the Métis gathered and fought for their rights as a Nation. Also known as the Victory of the Frog Plain, or <i>la Victoire de la Grenouillère</i> .
Botas	(say: boh-tahs) Métis half-leggings are called <i>botas</i> (say: boh-tahs) or <i>mitasses</i> (say: mih-tah-ses). These hide leggings are worn over cloth trousers to protect the trousers.
Boulettes	(say: boo-lets) Ground meat made into meatballs and rolled in flour and boiled. Also called bullets in Alberta.
Bois-Brulés	(say: bwa broo-lay) A French term that translates to "burnt wood." Another name for the early Métis.
Caber Tossing	(say: cay-ber) A traditional voyageur game that involves the tossing of a log.



Capote	(say: cah-pote) A wool winter coat with a hood that is bound together by a belt wrapped around the waist. It does not have buttons nor a zipper.
Cariole	(say: care-ee-ole) An enclosed-style dog sled.
Cat's Cradle	A string game that is still common today. In this game, string is looped around multiple fingers to create designs. When played with a partner, the goal is to pass a design back and forth. Also called strings by some.
Chivaree	(say: shiv-ah-ree) A Michif word for a party.
Community	A unified group of individuals; a group of people who share a living place, a common characteristic or identity.
Customs	A way of doing something that is unique to a particular place, community, or time. These particular ways of behaving often have unique histories.
Culture	Culture is the sum of the attitudes, customs and beliefs that distinguish one group of people from another. Métis culture, traditions, and history guide us today in all our endeavors as a Nation of people.
Cuthbert Grant	The first leader of the Métis of the early 19 th century. Under his leadership, Métis asserted their nationhood and economic freedom when Canada attempted to control the trade of pemmican in 1814.
Displacement	The act or process of removing an item, individual or group from their place of belonging. Displaced people are people who have been forced from their homes as a result of a natural, technological, or deliberate event. ³
Dispossession	The process of transferring ownership of assets—including land and natural resources—so that the original owners, users, or beneficiaries no longer enjoy their rights. It may involve coercive, extra-legal, or questionable means.
Dog-Sled	A winter activity that involves one or more dogs pulling a sled. Dog sledding is used to travel over ice and snow, as well as racing.
Dovetail	A technique of interlocking different types of wood to form reliable, sturdy buildings.
Embroidery	The creation of decorative artwork using silk or cotton threads to embellish textiles in decorative styles.
Ethnogenesis	The emergence of Métis as a distinct ethnicity. Métis ethnogenesis acknowledges the beginnings of First Nations and European ancestors coming together, but Métis today have developed their own distinctive community with culture and traditions that are not simply 'mixed,' but rather, Métis.



Euro-Canadian	Describing people and groups who have ancestry and national affiliation primarily with European nations. This is primarily in reference to the settlers from European nations who have worked to colonize the land for the last two centuries.
Feu de Joie	(say: fuh duh joy) A term for a celebratory tradition of firing guns in salute at a ceremony.
Fiddle	A musical instrument. Fiddle is a community name of the violin when used to play Métis tunes.
Finger Weaving	The practice of braiding, twisting, or knitting, by hand, threads, cords, yarn, or other materials to create various materials such as belts, sashes, straps, and more.
Fire bag	Fire bags were decorated pouches that carried fire-starting materials like flint and steel, as well as tobacco, pipes, and ammunition.
First Nations	Defined by the Alberta Teachers' Association as "status and non-status Indian peoples in Canada." ⁴
Fish Scale art	Fish scale artists harvest and dye fish scales by hand and then arrange the scales to create beautiful imagery.
Foremother	A person's female ancestor.
Freemen	Men and families that would build independent relationships with trade partners, taking up individual contracts for trade or other work with Euro-Canadian companies. They would also work as independent middlemen, trading first with Indigenous communities on their own, then later with the companies.
Gauntlet	A covering for the hands that extends past the wrist. There are both glove and mitten styles. Traditionally, most gauntlets were made of animal hide. Many gauntlets are beaded, embroidered, or decorated with quillwork.
Governance	To exercise continuous and direct policy-making authority over an administrative body or group of people.
Government	The system that administers, manages, and delivers services to citizens in a community or given territory.
Harvesting	Refers to all aspects of collecting resources from the land. Métis harvesting includes trapping, hunting, fishing, medicine gathering, berry picking, and fetching of other required needs.
Hide Tanning	The process of treating skins or hides of animals to prepare for various uses of leather.
Homeland	The area known by individuals, communities, and nations as being home to their ancestors.



Hunting	A harvesting practice, this refers to the shooting of game, including, but not limited to, rabbits, grouse, moose, bison, elk, and deer.
Identity	The individual characteristics by which a thing or person is recognized or known.
Indigenous	A term describing the identity, culture, or heritage of anyone whose ancestors traditionally occupied a territory that has been threatened by colonization. There are three groups of Indigenous peoples in Canada: Inuit, Métis, and First Nations. Each group is unique and has its own history, languages, cultural practices, political structures, and spiritual beliefs.
Kinscape	Referencing the expansive network of relationships amongst the Métis Homeland between the Métis people and the land itself. Kinscapes are foundational component to Métis nationhood and governance.
Kinship	A term referencing the sense of connection, relationship, and sense of responsibility to one another between family, extended family, friends, trading partners, and community members. The term often extends to natural and spiritual worlds, human and non-human, living and not living worlds. (say: la vick-twar de la gron-we-yayr)
La Victoire de la Grenouillère	This battle is one of the first times the Métis gathered and fought for their rights as a Nation, June 9, 1816. Also known as the Battle of Seven Oaks and the Victory of the Frog Plain.
Louis Riel	One of the Homeland Heroes of the Métis Nation, Riel was a prominent leader of the Métis through the late 19 th century. He led several provisional governments in Red River, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. He also led Métis through two major resistance movements against the Government of Canada. Riel also was a founder of the province of Manitoba, and was a twice-elected Canadian Member of Parliament. He was tried in Canadian courts and hanged on November 16, 1885.
Manitou Sakahikan	(say: man-ih-too sah-guy-gun) A Cree term, translated by most as meaning God's Lake or Spirit Lake. The name is first found in writing on a map expressed as "Lake Manitou" in 1801. This lake is most commonly known as Lac Ste Anne on contemporary Alberta maps.
Métis	Métis is enshrined in Section 35 of the 1982 <i>Constitution Act</i> (s.35(2)). The accepted definition of Métis as stated by the Métis National Council is: "a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation." ⁵
Métis River Lots	A way of dividing and distributing land into long, narrow parcels used in many early settlements across the Métis Homeland, such as St. Albert, Edmonton, Prince Albert, and Red River. As the name suggests, these lots were positioned along waterways, and their long, narrow shape helped ensure that every home had access to the water (which was important for drinking, cleaning, fishing, and transportation), forested areas (for building materials and fuel), and space to farm. It was an adaptation of the French seigneurial (say: seyg-noor-ee-al) system.



Metis Settlements	Eight areas of land set aside as protected lands for Métis to live and govern themselves on. Known today as Metis Settlements, which were formerly commonly called Metis Colonies by Métis, and others.
Métis Week	The Métis Nation of Alberta declared the week surrounding November 16 as "Métis Week." November 16 is a day that Métis people across Canada remember and honor the dedication and sacrifices of Louis Riel for the Métis Nation.
Michif	Michif is the distinct, Indigenous language of the Métis. In Alberta, this language draws, in varying degrees by dialect, from the French and Cree languages spoken by ancestors of Métis. It was first developed orally and was later made into a written language.
Mission	Refers to specific buildings or gathering places, established to do religious or charitable work in an area. People who work and live in the community of the mission buildings are often called missionaries. In Catholic churches, these are often priests and nuns. Methodist churches also had missions.
Mitasses	(say: mih-tah-ses) Métis half-leggings are called <i>botas</i> or <i>mitasses</i> . These hide leggings are worn over cloth trousers to protect the trousers from being worn out.
Mobility	The movement of Métis across the Homeland is at the heart of the Métis experience.
Moccasins	(say: mah-kah-sins) Like a shoe, made of animal hide. Moccasins may be adorned with fur and/or beadwork.
Mouth Harp	An instrument made by finding a willow, carving it into a curve with a knife, then tying several wet sinew strings tightly on either end. ⁶
Mukluks	The tall boot version of the moccasin. Like a shoe, made of animal hide. Mukluks may be adorned with fur and/or beadwork.
Multilingualism	The use of more than one language, either by an individual speaker or by a group of speakers
National Indigenous Peoples Day (NIPD)	June 21 st is proclaimed and nationally recognized by the Government of Canada as the day to celebrate the cultures, heritages, and identities, of the Indigenous people in Canada. It is also about understanding the contributions Indigenous people have made to Canada. June 21 st was chosen because it is the summer solstice (the longest day of the year) and is significant for many Indigenous ceremonies.
Nationhood	National identity or independence.



Networking

The process of interacting with others to build economic, professional, or social relationships.

(say: oh-tee-pem-ih-si-wahk)

Otipemisiwak

A word in the Cree language expressing the idea that the Métis lead, govern, care for, and own themselves. This was the name that the Cree kin of the Métis dedicated to them. *Otipemisiwak* is not fully understood in one English term or expression.

Pemmican

Traditionally made of dried meat, usually buffalo or moose meat, and pounded into coarse powder and mixed with an equal amount of fat, and seasonal berries, such as saskatoon berries, cranberries, cherries, or currants.

Perspective

A person's unique way of understanding and responding to the world based on his or her experience, community, beliefs, values, stories, languages, laws, ethics, and behaviors.

Pilgrimage

A journey, often undertaken for religious reasons, in which one embarks on a search for new or expanded meaning about oneself, others, nature, or a higher good.

Portaging

The practice of carrying boats and goods over land, either around an obstacle in a river, or between two bodies of water.

Pouchin

(say: poo-shin)

Boiled cake.

Propagate

To spread or promote ideas, theories, and more to a wide audience

Quillwork

An artistic practice of softening, dying, and applying porcupine quills to embellish textiles in decorative styles.

Raconteur

(say: rah-con-toor)

Some storytellers were called *raconteurs*. They tell stories that at first sound serious, but then turn into a joke.

Red River

The area of Red River includes the southern part of what is today Manitoba, the northwestern corner of Minnesota, USA, and a large chunk of North Dakota, USA. The Assiniboine River and the Red River are two major rivers flowing through the region. The Red River was called "the Lower Red" and the Assiniboine River "the Upper Red."⁷

Red River Cart

A wagon-style mode of transport traditionally made with only materials found on the plains. A typical Red River cart was a box made of wooden railings attached to two large wheels and two shafts to attach it to an animal. Métis in the Red River area invented this during the fur trade.



Red River Jig	A unique style of Métis dance that has origins in the Métis communities of the Red River Settlement.
Residential Schools and Day Schools	These are a variety of schools established between the 1880s until 1996 to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian communities and culture. These schools were funded by Euro-Canadian government and run by Catholic and Anglican churches. Assimilating Indigenous children would enable the Dominion of Canada to retain better control of communities and land.
Resilience	The capacity to survive and recover quickly from challenges.
Ring and Pin	The game is played using an object with one or more holes in it attached to a pointed piece. The game pieces for Ring and Pin can be simple (such as a stick and ring) or complex (some games have objects between the ring and stick, or multiple rings to catch). The general objective of the game is to successfully get your pin into the hole(s) using only one hand. This was a way to support children's development of motor skills and hand-eye coordination.
Road Allowance	A plot of crown land set aside for future development of roads.
Road Allowance People or Communities	The Métis that squatted on road allowance plots of land came to be known as the "road allowance people." The Métis living on road allowance lands were marginalized by racist Euro-Canadian societies, creating a variety of challenges for Métis families, such as barriers to health care, employment, and education.
Rubaboo	(say: roo-buh-boo) Rubaboo is a stew. It is made using a variety of meats, including rabbit or sage hen, and many vegetables. These include some of the commonly known vegetables such as onion, turnip, asparagus, and potato, as well as, lesser-known foods such as sage, bulrush root, cattail heads, pine nuts, and day lily roots. In winter, dried fruits and vegetables were added.
Rug Hooking	The practice of pulling loops of yarn or fabric through a stiff woven base, such as burlap, linen, or rug wrap.
Rupert's Land	In 1670, despite the presence of many Indigenous Nations, the English granted the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) much of North America. Prince Rupert of Rhine became the first appointed Governor of the HBC's new territory, and so the North-West was also known as Rupert's Land. The name Rupert's Land became important to Métis as their trade partners, the HBC would call the region Rupert's Land.
Sash	The Métis sash is one of the most recognizable symbols of Métis culture and identity. The sash is a hand-woven wool belt that is made in various lengths. Its fringed ends are both decorative and functional. The sash comes in many different colours. Some people have assigned meanings to the colours and patterns of the sash. The sash was worn as an accessory and tool with a variety of uses—for example, a belt, rope, sling, scarf, washcloth, etc.



Self-determination	The right of a people to decide their own destiny, their own education, political status, economic habits, and cultural and social traditions.
Settler	A person who moves to a new place with the intention to stay there. Most settlers impacting Métis communities through history are Euro-Canadians.
Sixties Scoop	From 1951 through to the 1980s, the Government of Canada, with the support of churches in Canada, targeted Métis children and removed them from their families to be placed in middle-class Euro-Canadian homes that were far away from their birth families. ⁸ This system is known as the "Sixties Scoop." While some Métis children grew up in safe, loving adopted homes, many experienced all forms of abuse and were used for labour by their adopted families. Almost all children scooped from their Métis families never experienced an opportunity to learn about their Métis heritage, culture, and traditions.
Sledges	An open-style dog sled.
Smudging	A ceremonial tradition involving the burning of medicinal plants for the purpose of purifying or cleansing the soul of negative thoughts of a person or place. ⁹
Spirituality	The quality of considering the spirit or soul of one's being.
Spoons	A term referencing the use of two utensils as an instrument. The traditional practice requires the use of two metal kitchen spoons.
Storytelling	An educational practice that involves the sharing of a collection of historical accounts. A way to instill knowledge of the mind, body, and soul in connection to the earth through experienced and trusted "knowledge keepers."
Sovereignty	The authority of a nation to govern itself.
Tendrils	A special type of leaf or stem that takes on a threadlike shape to support plants as they climb up and/or attach to a surface.
Tourniquet	(say: toor-nih-ket) A device for stopping the flow of blood through a vein or artery, typically by compressing a limb with a sash, cord, or tight bandage.
Tourtière	(say: toor-tee-air) A pie with ground meat and spices for filling.
Traditions	Long-standing customs that are an expression of values and identity.



Trapline	The route in which traps would be set. An individual trapper has their own trapline that no one else can trap on.
Trapper's Tent	A style of tent used by harvesters. Usually made of canvas material pulled tight over a four-walled-vertical frame.
Trapping	This type of harvesting involves the setting of traps for fur-bearing animals. Trapping is primarily used for harvesting animal furs. Some people also eat the meat of the trapped animals.
Tufting	A technique of harvesting, dyeing, and stitching moose hair to create beautiful, soft, three-dimensional flowers and leaves. When moose hair tufting, the artist pulls a small bunch of moose hair under a loop stitch and fastens it.
Tumpline	A strap or sling passed around the chest or forehead to help support a pack carried on a person's back.
Tuppie	(say: tuh-pee) A small dog blanket, often decorated in the traditional Métis floral design with bright beads or embroidery and accented with wool, ribbons, and bells. Also called <i>li tapis</i> .
Values	The principles of particular standards of behavior or ways of living.
Voyageur	A person hired by the fur trade companies of the 18 th and 19 th centuries to transport goods and passengers to and from trading posts by boats.
Wake	A gathering where friends and family of a deceased member share stories, memories, food, support, and their goodbyes. Wakes are named as such because traditionally one or more family members and friends stay awake all night with the body.
York Boat	A large, shallow-water boat. It was invented by William Sinclair, a Métis man who was the chief tradesman with a crew of Métis men at York Factory, a Hudson's Bay Company headquarters in northern Manitoba. York boats can be rowed or sailed.



Introduction

The **Métis** Nation has dynamic, beautiful **traditions, values,** experiences, and relationships. This book is a guide for educators that highlights the key features of Métis **culture** and traditions. These features provide insight into the colour and vibrancy of Métis society. This book provides a glimpse into Métis culture and traditions.

For the purposes of this book, the terms “Métis culture” and “Métis traditions” refer to the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of Métis communities. Métis culture and traditions are woven into the fabric of the everyday lives of the people.

This theme begins with a discussion titled “Understanding Perspective.” Educators are encouraged to read this resource with an open, reflective attitude, while being cognizant of their own values and **identity**. The goal of this section is to challenge common ways of thinking about Métis culture and traditions to form a solid foundation. Experiencing the layers of cultural meaning is a delicate process, and it must be done in a thoughtful, respectful manner. As Elmer Ghostkeeper explains:

Peeling the layers of cultural meaning is a delicate process and a thing of beauty in the hands of a caring person. Exposing an oral culture to the scrutiny of the written page, baring meaning for all to see, must be done in a thoughtful and respectful manner.

—Dr. Wanda Wuttunee, quoted in Elmer Ghostkeeper, *Spirit Gifting: The Concept of Spiritual Exchange* (Duncan: Writing on Stone Press, 2007), Forward.

Understanding Perspective

Métis culture and traditions are interesting and distinct from other **Indigenous** cultures. This prelude to exploring culture and traditions begins by defining **perspective**; it then explains of what perspective is comprised and then shows how one’s personal perspective influences one’s understanding of individuals and groups. Digging deeper into the concept of perspective equips teachers with reflective cognitive tools that can help them share Métis culture and traditions in their classrooms.

A particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view.

—Oxford English Dictionary, “Perspective,”
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/perspective>

Perspective is the way people determine how to evaluate their life and experiences, including how they discern between what is right and wrong. Perspective is instrumental in how one defines success and purpose in life.

Perspective aids in the interpretation of relationships with people and things around us. Perspective guides a person’s actions in those relationships.

Perspective refers to the way one interprets the world that they have encountered. It can also be called “worldview,” “ways of knowing” or “frame of mind.”

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The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “perspective” using the word “attitude.” A person’s perspective is developed, in part, in the “cognitive unconscious.”¹⁰ “Perspective” refers not only to someone’s intentional thoughts and ideas but also to the parts of their thinking that are not actively noticed, engaged with, or identified by the thinker.

The cognitive unconscious is found in language, ways of living, and through the way we make decisions. Each person’s perspective originates from the world they live in, the people whose lives they are a part of, the values and ideas that are taught and practised in their communities, and their lived experience.

Understanding perspective is important because it is easy to inadvertently slip into studying and presenting non-Western cultures as something separate from, and less important than, Western culture, which is dominant in Canadian society. The impact of one’s personal perspective can easily go unnoticed in a person’s day-to-day life. It is important to challenge this “normal” perspective because it can result in the harmful treatment and misunderstanding of the Métis and Métis culture.

Learning about Métis culture and traditions provides an opportunity for educators to reflect on ideas they may have about Métis people, their own culture and traditions, and the cultures and traditions of the diverse peoples around them. Several initial guiding reflective questions are presented below.

Problems arise when we take for granted that our interpretation of reality is the only one, or the best one. It is very easy to judge other people based on our personal, limited perspective.

—Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, *Our Way is a Valid Way* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Education, 2013), 31.

"The world in which you were born is just one model of reality. Other cultures are not failed attempts at being you; they are unique manifestations of the human spirit."

—Wade Davis, quoted in Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, *Our Way is a Valid Way*, 31.

Who are you?
What beliefs, values, and ideas help you make decisions about your life and your family?
Do these align with the values, ideas, and beliefs that govern the decisions that leaders make in Canadian society?
What are some of the celebrations that are important to your family, and where do these originate?
Why do you celebrate them?

Everyone benefits when educators celebrate the perspectives and cultures of their students. Historically and today, Métis culture and traditions are often absent and misunderstood in Canadian classrooms. It is essential, for all students, that educators adopt a positive, healthy perspective and an appreciation of Métis culture and traditions.

"Students who are ashamed of their culture and try to hide their cultural identity tend to have low engagement in school and lower rates of success. Students who are proud of their heritage, have a strong cultural identity, and feel safe in expressing their identity experience higher academic achievement."

—Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, *Our Way is a Valid Way*, 92.

Without [their] culture, without that strong line from [their] forefathers, no [person] knows who [they] really [are]. If one does not know who [they are], [they] cannot possess pride or dignity for [themselves] or [their] people.

— Dr. Anne Anderson, *The First Métis: A New Nation* (Edmonton: UVISCO Press, 1985), 14.



Figure 2. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Métis grandmother teaches Métis children some traditions,” July 25, 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Section One

Heart of the Métis

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These core Métis values are important for understanding Métis life and identity. They manifest in both subtle and obvious ways, historically and today.

This section provides only a brief introduction to core Métis values and cannot replace direct experience with Métis community and relatives.

The Métis hold many events and community gatherings that people of all backgrounds are welcome to join.

Contact Métis offices near you, including the Métis Nation of Alberta and Rupert's Land Institute, to find out who your Métis neighbours are and which gatherings you would like to join.¹¹

Community, Networking, & Kinship

Métis traditions and cultural practices celebrate, serve, and strengthen the family; the strength of a community is reflective of its families. Family gatherings connect people to one another, and these connections make life rich. Valuing relationships creates strong, united **kinships** among Métis families and communities.

Honouring relationships is tied to Métis entrepreneurship. **Networking** is foundational to the prosperity and independence of the Métis. Networking was advantageous to the Métis during the years of the fur trade. Métis roles as **freemen** positioned them as central to the economic relationships between **First Nations** and colonial groups.¹²

The diligent, hardworking nature of the Métis is complemented by an exuberant, lively community life. A variety of Métis cultural expressions emphasize celebration and socialization. It is common for Métis people to get together and play a quick tune on the **fiddle**, get out the **spoons**, and do some jiggling. Informal gatherings, like inviting people over for tea, provide a venue for **storytelling** and teaching skills such as beading. Gathering around the table or the fire in the evening after a long day of **trapping** or working is also a prime time for sharing stories of all kinds.

Community, Networking, & Kinship

Traditional Storytelling

Mobility & Adaptability

Resilience

In her research, Diane Payment reflected that the network of Métis relationships gave their space of residence "the character of a 'big family.' The community was homogenous, united (in spite of typical internal divisions)."

—Diane Payment, *The Free People – Li Gens Libres: A History of the Métis Community in Batoche, Saskatchewan* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2009), 42-44.

At any time, the Métis were capable of having a good time given an opportunity. Visiting is an important pastime and the Métis place a great emphasis on relationships and friendships. Over time, the Métis have established common gathering places for visiting. For instance. . . it was the social activities in the home, which drew the most people into close association for mutual support, comfort and celebration. House parties could occur whenever people felt like visiting. Women brought sandwiches, cake, pie, coffee, tea while the men played music. Sometimes the host or hostess did not know a party was on its way to their house until it arrived, unannounced! In some Métis communities after church, people gathered for ball games, card games or to have dinner together. Socialization led to the development of a rich and varied entertainment life among the Métis.

—Todd Paquin, Darren R. Préfontaine, and Patrick Young, *Traditional Métis Socialization and Entertainment* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2002), 1, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/db/00724>.



Gatherings are essential to the Métis way of life. Celebrations gather people in, and bring people back to, their home communities. Gatherings are a way of affirming Métis identity.¹³



Figure 3. Métis Nation of Alberta, Youth & Seniors Gathering, January 2019, <http://albertametis.com/3rd-annual-youth-and-seniors-gathering/>.

Traditional Stories

Passing down traditional skills and knowledge from one generation to the next is viewed as a privilege and a key part of the legacy of Métis cultural heritage. The memories and stories of learning these skills are cherished among families.

Traditional stories are essential to Métis community. Métis children, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunties, and uncles—from the young to the elderly—everyone shares stories and teachings which guide their ways of thinking and doing and of interpreting the world. Métis identity, history, and traditions and their meanings are expressed in the stories that are shared among Métis families.¹⁴

—Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, *Mark of the Métis* (Fort McMurray: Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, 2012), 88.

"Learning history through textbooks is not enough. . . . It is important for students to learn by hearing stories of the past. . . . Stories help to create empathy and engage students, giving them an opportunity to see things from another perspective."

—Norma Spicer, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, July 24, 2019.

Mobility & Adaptability

The Métis are an adaptive, strong, creative people. Métis values unify communities regardless of location. As a collective, the Métis have adapted in periods of dispersion and forced migration. The Métis have faced discrimination, and their ability to adapt and even move in the face of challenging circumstances has been crucial to their survival/prosperity as individuals and as a nation.

Métis **mobility** and **adaptability** have also resulted in diverse Métis ways of living. Some Métis communities settled in places that are now urban centres, so some Métis live urban lifestyles. Other Métis remain anchored to rural communities in the **Homeland**.



There is even diversity in ways of living among rural Métis communities. For example, some Métis live on **Metis Settlements**, the Métis-secured land base in Alberta. Other Métis live on farms in rural areas outside of the Metis Settlements. Some Métis choose to live in rural areas simply because they appreciate the solitude of a rural lifestyle. Wherever they live, the Métis are unified by the value they place in **resilience**, teachings and stories, community, and kinship—all of which remain strong in the Métis collective.¹⁵

Mobility—defined as the willingness, knowledge, and family structure to be on the move across the landscape for traditional purposes and for wage work—is at the heart of the Métis experience.

—Maria Campbell, *Riel's People: How the Métis Lived* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1978 [reprinted 1992]), 46.

Resilience

Resilience is a defining feature of Métis **nationhood**. Métis resilience is evident in the daily lives of the Métis. Despite Canada's history, which calls Métis a “defeated” people, resilience is evident in Métis literature, academic writing, art, **governance**, politics, and in many other areas of contemporary life.

Today, as in the old days, they play their fiddles, sing, dance, and tell their children stories. They work hard, as they have always done. . . .
They know who they are:

“Ka tip aim soot chic” —the people who own themselves.

—Maria Campbell, *Riel's People: How the Métis Lived* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1978 [reprinted 1992]), 46.

Maria Campbell, a Métis author and leader, uses the **Michif**-Cree expression *ka tip aim soot chic*—which means “the people who own themselves”—to identify Métis resilience. A more commonly known term that means the same thing is **otipemisiwak** (say: oh-tih-pem-ih-see-wak.) Both terms express the reality that the Métis know, govern, own, and care for themselves. These terms refer to parallel notions of individual independence and communal independence, which are intertwined in the Métis story.

As early as the 1830s, Métis nationhood and communities were organized by traditional values and were expressed through cultural expressions and practices throughout the Métis Homeland.¹⁶ At that time, the daily cultural practices and traditions in the Métis way of life were thriving. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Canada progressively advanced into Métis territory and assumed ownership over the Métis Homeland. **Settlers** displaced not only Métis families but also the cultural practices that connected them to Métis traditions.¹⁷ Many Métis have denied or hidden their cultural and national identity in order to protect their families from mistreatment.

Despite this mistreatment, **dispossession**, and **displacement**, Métis continue to move towards a skilled, knowledgeable, and self-reliant Métis Nation.



Métis have had to endure many hardships throughout their collective displacement, yet Métis traditions have been retained and maintained. Over the past decades, Métis culture has begun to resurface in Canadian society. As the injustices the Métis faced have been unveiled to the Canadian public, human rights movements have begun to make space for Métis expressions of identity. Gradually, it has become more acceptable to talk about and celebrate being Métis.¹⁸

In this period of revival, many Métis have drawn from the wisdom of their **ancestors**, as the older generations of Métis still remember the old ways, including traditions that have sustained the people since the birth of Métis. In spite of the traumatic events that Métis have had to endure, the older Métis keep the seeds of Métis traditions and identity safe in their stories and memories. In returning to the older Métis generations and listening to their stories, Métis have been strengthening the Nation and revitalizing Métis culture and traditions.

Resilience of the Flower Beadwork People

“Historically, after Louis Riel was hanged, many communities (especially in urban areas) were in fear of retaliation and felt it was safer for their families to hide their Métis heritage. Their descendants often grew up never knowing they were Métis. The resurgence of our culture and interest in genealogies brought many new members into our fold. Sometimes through lateral violence these members are frowned upon and scorned for not knowing their history and culture. They should be welcomed with open arms in the true Métis spirit of community and friendship.”

—Norma Spicer, personal communication with Rupert's Land Institute, July 24, 2019.

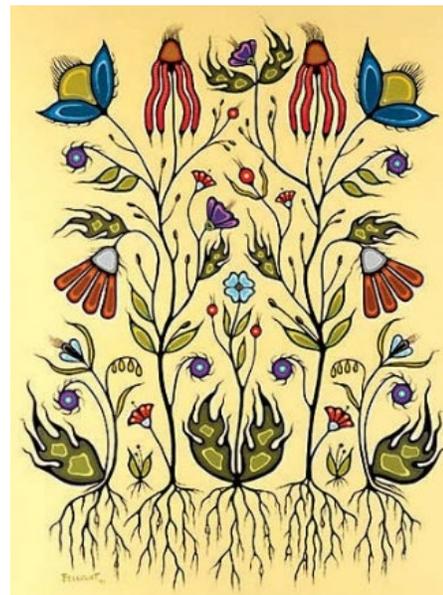


Figure 4. Christi Belcourt, *Resilience of the Flower Beadwork People*, 1999, Acrylic on Canvas, 36" x 48", Collection of Shane Belcourt & Amanda Greener, <http://christibelcourt.com/early-work/resilience/>.



Section Two

Celebrating Métis Traditions & Culture



Figure 5. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Beaded Moccasins," November 22, 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

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Traditional Métis Apparel	12-15	Métis Storytelling Traditions	39-40
Métis Sash Traditions	16-18	Métis Sports and Games	41-42
Métis Flag	18	Faith Traditions	43-44
Distinct Métis Building Traditions	19-23	Métis Medicinal Practices	45
Traditional Métis Transportation	23-25	Métis Celebrations	46-51
Métis Artistic Traditions & Culture	26-31	Métis Harvesting and Culinary Traditions	52-54
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Métis Family Traditions

It is appropriate to begin with the family when exploring Métis traditions and culture because it is within Métis families that cultural traditions have been fostered. As many educators may know, what constitutes “family” is culturally defined. The idea of a nuclear family—consisting of a father, a mother, and their biological children—is dominant in Western society. In the Western model, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents are considered to be one’s extended family.

The family was the core of Métis society historically and remains the core today.

—Diane Payment, *The Free People – Li Gens Libres: A History of the Métis Community of Batoche*, Saskatchewan (Calgary: University of Calgary, 2006), 42.

Métis children know that their guardians are not just their mothers and fathers but also their aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Beyond Western tradition, aunts and uncles in Métis society are not just the biological siblings of their mother and father; aunts and uncles play a role as nurturing, caring adults in a child’s life, as do other family friends, cousins, and other people. It is common practice in many Métis families for everyone to contribute to the raising of children.

In many Métis families, members call one another by their kinship ties, rather than by formal given names. One Métis man shared that he calls his brother “Brother” instead of by his given name, “Macey.”¹⁹ Family kinship terms such as this demonstrate the value of kinship in Métis families, which is distinct from that in many **Euro-Canadian** families.

Nicknames are also quite common in Métis families. Almost everyone has a nickname, which they usually get because of something that happened to them.

“I learned about an uncle that had passed away before I had a chance to meet him. Everybody called him Uncle Jeep. I asked my sister why everybody called him that. She told me he was a firefighter and was the straw boss and had his own crew. One day they encountered a big hill and he packed everything up on his back and one of his crewmembers said, ‘There’s a real jeep.’ Ever since that day everybody called him Jeep.”

—Lisa Cruickshank, sharing a story about her uncle Gabriel Justin Bourque, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, December 2019.

The kinship web defined in Cree and Michif languages extends beyond the Western family mode. For example, there are distinct notions of relationship between the mother’s side and father’s side of the family. While exploring the intricacies of Métis kinship terms and traditions is beyond the scope of this document, it is essential that educators know that many Métis families are organized differently from the standard generally promoted by Western institutions. It is important that these differences be acknowledged and celebrated.



Acknowledging Métis Women

With Métis families at the core of Métis communities, the roles of each family member define the community. Historically, women’s contributions to Métis nation-building have been neglected, and patriarchal approaches to studying history and society have predominated.²⁰ In general, the **hunting**, trapping, and trading practices of Métis men dominate what Canadians know about Métis history. The contributions of Métis women—including in art, craftsmanship, medicine, and economics—have often gone unrecognized. This resource puts particular emphasis on the contributions of Métis women to provide educators with a more comprehensive review of the development of Métis culture and traditions.

Métis women were integral to all endeavors. [They] played important roles in commercial and domestic production and in the political life. . . . Métis women were clothing designers, doctors, pharmacists, midwives, peacekeepers, teachers, artists, and agriculturalists. Métis women were the children's teachers and keepers of the Métis languages.

—Lawrence Barkwell, *Women of the Métis Nation*, 2nd ed. (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute Press, 2012), 8.

Métis women have created many beautiful contemporary and traditional crafted creations. Many Métis women are expert needle workers, and they create clothing and items in a distinctive Métis style.²¹ Each Métis woman had a unique style, a reflection of her creative abilities and individual preferences. Women produced custom designs to fit the preferences of the person who would wear the item, or as a way to express their ancestry.²²

Many Métis women are and were passionate entrepreneurs, running businesses to produce these creations. Historical records note their distinct entrepreneurship methods for manufacturing and marketing their creations, which distinguish Métis women from other Indigenous entrepreneurs.²³ Métis women crafted both to clothe their families and to generate income for their families, thus ensuring the self-sufficiency of the Nation. Some women produced large quantities of artisan goods, which were highly prized and traded across **Rupert’s Land**.²⁴ Métis women also designed custom pieces to meet the style and fit of their customers.²⁵

By developing their own style and by making large quantities of objects that were then sold or exchanged, women played an important economic role within the Métis nation. At the same time, they have also helped spread the cultural identity of the Métis, a proud nation.

—Nathalie Kermaal, “Floral Beadwork: A Métis Cultural Heritage to Rediscover,” in *Encyclopedia of French Cultural Heritage in North America*, http://www.ameriquefrancaise.org/en/article-476/Floral_Beadwork:_A_M%C3%A9tis_Cultural_Heritage_to_Rediscover_.html.

Figure 6. This unnamed Métis family was photographed in Pincher Creek, Alberta around 1910.

Photo: Sherry Farrell Racette, “Sewing for a Living: The Commodification of Métis Women’s Artistic Production,” in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada’s Colonial Past*, eds. Myra Rutherdale and Katie Pickles (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 41.





Therese and Ernie Ray Michael, a Métis couple who live in Fort McMurray, shared a story that demonstrates the time and energy they invested in creating these beautiful items.

“Us women, not only me, but there's quite a few of them that could sew. That's how they help out to provide for their man, for the children, by sewing. . . . I don't know, where was my time? You ask me when I had time to do that when I had nine kids to look after and still sewing, besides cooking and cleaning. I never used to sleep very much. I used to stay up 'til two in the morning.”

Her husband continued, saying, “Longer than that sometimes, I think. We used to go to bed. She'd clean the table. Put her tea kettle on the stove and clean the table, bring out her moose hide, her wool and stuff. And I'd get up in the morning, six o'clock, there'd be a pair of high-top mukluks hanging on the chair for sale, fifteen dollars. Fifteen dollars.”

—Therese and Ernie Ray Michael, in Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, *Mark of the Métis* (Fort McMurray: Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, 2012), 86.

Delphine Berard (née Cardinal), is a Métis woman who was born in Fishing Lake, Alberta, in 1938. She also shared a story of the work her mother did in caring for their family.

“My Mom used to tan the hides of deer and moose for footwear, mittens, and nice jackets. She used the hair that she scraped off hides to stuff pillows and mattresses. She would stretch rabbit hides and sell them for five cents each, and made socks and mittens out of old sweaters that were given to us.”

—Delphine Berard, quoted in Eleanor Verbicky, ed., *Life and Times of the Métis: A History of Caslan Métis Settlement* (Alberta: Alberta Federation of Metis Settlement Associations, 1984).

Despite Métis women's immense contributions to Métis art and Métis nationhood, Métis women's work has often been insufficiently recognized. Colonial museums often failed to give due credit to Métis women's art, as their artistic endeavours faced the dual discrimination associated with being made by a Métis person and a woman. Thankfully, the prejudices inherent in colonial museums are now being unpacked, and Métis women are increasingly recognized for their work. Their stories are being told.



Traditional Métis Apparel

This section introduces traditional, historical Métis apparel and also discusses how these historical Métis styles have evolved into a distinct, contemporary Métis style. The clothing examined in this review demonstrates the historical influence of the fur trade, the changes in economies, and the resistance and development of the Métis community.²⁶

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Métis wore buffalo coats, buckskin shirts, vests, and coats adorned with complex beadwork. Other common Métis apparel included the Métis **sash**, **capotes** (say: cah-pote), caps, decorated leggings, and **moccasins**. Most Métis at the time wore clothing that was handmade by women in their family, and clothing was shared among family members. Some premade clothing was available in stores, but Métis families generally made and reused their clothing.

By the 1870s, the Métis began to adapt and include more European clothing into their regular style.²⁷ How much individual Métis adopted European styles varied and was dependent on an individual's social status, lifestyle, and place of residence. Traditional Métis clothing reflects the historic events that have impacted the Métis, including being dispossessed of their homes and land, overcoming destitution, and facing discrimination and racism.

Louis Goulet, a Métis man, was recorded having said that "the Métis were proud and always well-dressed, even though the winterers (the people in the hunting and trading camps of the North-West) did not dress the same way as the people of Red River, who dressed according to the latest Montreal or St. Paul fashions."

—Guillaume Charette, *L'Espace de Louis Goulet* (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1976), 66-68; Payment, *Li Gens Libres*, 5.



Traditional Métis clothing styles have important histories. Significantly, they express Métis history and story. As in the past, traditional apparel is still used to tell Métis stories, or to give honour to the Nation. Sometimes, depending on the setting, an adapted version of traditional apparel is worn. For example, shawls have become part of Métis formal wear, and they are often worn at celebrations.

Figure 7. Terry Boucher and Roxanne Sousa, Métis community members, wear some traditional Métis clothing while standing in front of a canvas tent at National Aboriginal Peoples Day, 2017.

Métis Nation of Alberta, n.d. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



The Women's Shawl

The shawl is a traditional piece of clothing worn by Métis women historically and today. It is a section of cloth, cut in various sizes, which is draped over the shoulders.

"[Women] wore a small shawl or big kerchief [made out of silk] on their chests, plus another one on their heads for going out, as well as a shawl [on their shoulders]."

—Louis Schmidt, quoted in Payment, *The Free People – Li Gens Libres*, 56.

Figure 8. Shawl, mid-20th century, cotton, wool, silk embroidery thread, AR 254, Collection of Glenbow Museum. Courtesy of Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta.



Coats, Capotes, Vests, and Shirts

A capote is a wool winter jacket with a hood held shut by a belt wrapped around the waist. Capotes were often created from Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) blankets. The capote is a Métis adaptation, since it involved taking the HBC blanket—which was popular across Canada—and repurposing it into a coat.²⁸ Capotes are warm and flexible, well-suited to wintering in the plains.

Métis tops, including vests and shirts, are recognizable by their distinctly Métis styles of decorative beading, **embroidery**, and fringe. Métis women were responsible for this hard work, though their contributions were often not recognized in displays of Métis clothing.²⁹

One of the consequences of breaking the Laws of the Buffalo Hunt was to have your coat torn up. Imagine the effect of such actions in your relationship with your wife – all her work would be torn apart if you acted carelessly!



Figure 9. Métis-designed hide coat, Collection of Métis Nation of Alberta. Courtesy of Billie-Jo Grant, January 2020, personal collection.



Figure 10. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Brianna Lizotte wearing a capote,” Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta, August 2019.



Figure 11. Vest, early 20th century, elk hide, velvet, glass beads, plastic buttons, cotton, AR 281, Collection of Glenbow Museum.

Courtesy of Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta.



Leggings

Métis half-leggings are called **botas** (say: boh-tahs) or **mitasses** (say: mih-tah-ses). These hide leggings are worn over cloth trousers to protect the trousers from being worn out. Leggings were especially common attire among Métis people who worked for the fur trade companies.³⁰ Figure 38 is an example of Métis leggings with beautiful embroidery. Leggings such as these would traditionally be worn by men.

Traditional Métis women’s leggings were worn under long dresses. Métis would beautify women’s leggings by beading a band near the bottom of the leggings, which would show under the dress.³¹

Figure 12. “Metis moccasins & leggings,” July 7, 2007, <http://www.pbase.com/phototrex/image/82208631>.

Footwear

Métis people wore a variety of footwear styles, but the most common style was homemade moccasins and **mukluks**. Throughout the years, the Métis have adapted footwear styles from other Indigenous groups. The main distinction is the addition of the floral beadwork to the vamp, though not all Métis wore footwear with beadwork.^a Today many Métis and non-Métis people wear shoes based on the traditional designs of Métis moccasins and mukluks.



Figure 13. Métis Nation of Alberta, Wrap-arounds with rubber boots, January 20, 2020. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



Figure 14. Courtesy of Lisa Cruickshank, “Grandma Lena’s Moccasins,” January 7, 2020, personal collection.

“When I was a young girl my father came home one day with 3 pairs of snowshoes for my brothers and me. He also gave us moccasins to wear while snowshoeing.

These moccasins weren’t like regular moccasins that had beautiful beading on them but rather just plain leather (with a soft sole and sides all cut from one piece of leather including the vamp and stitched together—the sides went up over the ankles by about 5 inches and had holes for running the leather lacing through.)

We stuffed our feet into as many of Dad’s wool socks as we could put on and walked on the snow, happy to pretend we were out in the wilderness and tracking animals.”

—Norma Spicer, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, August 21, 2019.

^a Vamp: The upper front part of a shoe or boot. In the photo above, the boots have a beaded flower on the vamp.



Other Adapted Accessories

Here are some examples of other adaptive Métis apparel items. These items demonstrate how the distinctly Métis design serves as decoration for practical items, including **fire bags**, caps, toques, and gloves.

The pill-box type cap is called a “smoking cap.”



Figure 15. Louis Riel Institute, Smoking cap, created by Gary Johnson, 2001, Louis Riel Institute Collection.



Métis **gauntlets** are a type of glove adorned with Métis beadwork.



Figure 17. Gauntlets, Collection of Métis Nation of Alberta, n.d., personal communication.

Figure 16. Métis-designed gauntlets, n.d., Collection of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Billie-Jo Grant, January 2020, personal collection.

The Fire Bag

A fire bag is a traditional Métis cultural item. Fire bags were decorated pouches that carried fire-starting materials like flint and steel, as well as tobacco, pipes, and ammunition. These bags were often held up by the sash and had fringes hanging from them. The Métis would customize this beautiful bag by adding uniquely recognizable, beautiful floral decorations.³²

As a part of the Métis story that is told in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, Jeninne Krauchi, a Métis artisan, created a twenty-six-foot-tall fire bag. Its nine flowers represent the nine Métis **Road Allowance** Communities, which were lost due to the imposition of Euro-Canadian settlement. Each of the communities are named within the intricate design.^b

Figure 18. Jennine Krauchi, Métis octopus bag, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, “Métis Beading, Poetry, Fiddling, and Human Rights Stories Showcased on Louis Riel Day,” February 17, 2016, humanrights.ca/.



^b To learn more about the Road Allowance Communities, consult the Foundational Knowledge Resource titled *Métis in Alberta*.



Métis Sash Traditions

The Métis sash is one of the most recognizable symbols of Métis culture and identity. The sash is a hand-woven wool belt, made in various lengths. Its fringed ends are both decorative and functional. The sash comes in many different colours; some colours and patterns carry specific meanings and connotations, which are explored below. The sash was worn as an accessory but was also a tool with a variety of uses. Here are some examples:



Figure 19. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Métis Sash,” n.d. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

- as a scarf or belt
- for holding items, such as a hunting knife or fire bag
- as a **tourniquet** (say: toor-nih-ket) for injuries^c
- as a sewing kit^d
- as a **tumpline**^e
- as a rope to pull canoes
- as a key holder
- as a washcloth or towel
- as a bridle/saddle blanket
- to mark buffalo as property after it was killed^f
- to cover one's ankles, protecting them in deep snow^g
- as a symbol of pride and affiliation
- as decoration

One of the first sashes recognized as traditional by the Métis in Alberta is called “L’Assomption Sash.” Originating in L’Assomption, Québec, this style of sash features a distinctive arrowhead design. In the early years, men wore their sash while they voyaged the rivers, managed trading posts, worked the land, or attended community gatherings. Many photographs of those times show the sash wrapped around the waist two or three times and tied in the middle with a little left dangling. This was a piece of their everyday attire, which, when tied in this manner, did not risk getting tangled or wrapped around something. For example, the sash, which was tied in the middle, could not be caught in the trees if you were riding a horse through the bush. Many Métis today wear their sash in this traditional style.

^c Tourniquet: tied around a limb to slow the flow of blood

^d Sewing Kit: holding materials and providing thread to be repurposed

^e Tumpline: a strap that passes over the forehead to carry a load on the back

^f Marker on buffalo: after the buffalo was killed, it was left on top to mark buffalo as their property

^g Ankle cover: to prevent snow from getting in leggings in deep snow



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.³³ 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.

"My late father, Harry Daniels, always wore his sash wrapped twice and tied in the middle. He once told me it was because that's how they wore it back in the day, whether they were working or celebrating. That made a lot of sense to me and now that's how I wear my sash."

—Gabriel Daniels, personal communication with Karen Collins of the Métis Nation of Alberta, November 2019.



Figure 20. Jerome Chabot, Métis Community Member, wearing the sash in front at the Métis Nation of Alberta, November 2019.



Figure 21. Two ways that Métis wear the Métis sash; Elizabeth Metis Settlement, "How to wear the Métis Sash," 2014, <http://www.elizabethms.ca/index.php/profile/culture>.

It is not uncommon, however, for Métis people of all ages and genders to adorn themselves with the sash.

Women often wear the sash as a symbol of pride and honour over the shoulder and crossing over the opposite hip, whereas men show their pride by wearing the sash tied around their waist. Today, Métis people often wear sashes during ceremonies, performances, and in cultural celebrations.

Diversity in Métis Sash Stories

Métis sashes hold important meaning to all Métis. These meanings are different for different Métis people and communities. Some meanings are linked to oral histories, such as the "Dark Times Sash," which serves as a reminder of the Métis history of resilience through many trials. For some people, each colour has a unique meaning, with the interlocking patterns of colour describing a good way of living. Some Métis people do not ascribe meanings to the colours, but still see the sash as a political symbol of Métis nationhood and community. Other Métis appreciate the sash primarily for its great utility (examples of which are described above). The story of the Métis sash is dynamic and diverse, but, across the Métis Homeland, the sash carries a clear cultural significance.



The diverse meanings that Métis people attribute to this cultural symbol offer a clear, concrete example of the Métis tradition of adaptability. Métis people remain unified in the diverse meanings, interpretations, and uses for the sash. It is essential that educators understand that Métis people have diverse expressions of their common traditional values when they facilitate and engage in activities and stories for their students about the Métis sash. Educators are encouraged to ask Métis families in their area to learn about the significance and meaning(s) of the sash to Métis communities where they live. They can then present activities in their classrooms that are reflective of the local meaning(s) of the Métis sash.



Figure 22. Métis Crossing, "Métis Crossing's Infinity Sash in 2018." Courtesy of Métis Crossing, n.d.

Métis Flag

The flag of the Métis is the oldest Canadian patriotic flag that is indigenous to Canada, predating the Canadian flag by over 150 years. The flag was presented by Alexander MacDonnell of the North-West company and was first used in 1815. The flag was later flown in 1816 by **Cuthbert Grant** during a battle called *La Victoire de la Grenouillère* (also known as the "Victory of Frog Plain," *Paashkiyaakaan daan la Prayrii di la Groonouyayr* [Michif], and the **Battle of Seven Oaks**). This marked the boiling point after years of conflict between the Northwest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company. This was one of the first times the Métis asserted themselves as a distinct nation of people with rights to trade and travel freely on their own land.³⁴ The flag symbolizes the creation of a new society, and the infinity symbol suggests that Métis people will exist forever.



"Our flags represent 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."

– President Audrey Poitras, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, January 20, 2020.

Figure 23. Métis Nation of Alberta, "The Métis Flag...", Facebook, September 11, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ABMetis/photos/a.389854408115/10157469112258116/?type=3&theater>.



Distinct Métis Building Traditions

Métis homes have interesting stories to tell about Métis people. The human story takes place within homes, and the shape and layout of homes reveal much about what a society values.³⁵

Historically and today, Métis people have lived in many different types of homes. This section presents two different uniquely Métis housing styles: **voyageur** tents and Métis folk homes. This section focuses on the buildings and architecture characteristic of the Métis communities of Alberta. Other sources are available that give a broader view of Métis building traditions across the Métis Homeland.³⁶

Stories and memories that recall the migration lifestyle reveal details about the homes of the Métis during the transitional time after the end of the buffalo hunt, when Métis were forced to adapt their ways of living and being. As per Métis tradition, Métis homes, such as voyageur tents and tipis, reflect the strength in adaptation and mobility.

wâskahikan
niikinaahk
mayzoon
wîkowin home
house maison

Métis Tent Traditions

One tent unique to Métis traditions is the canvas tent.^h Canvas tents are large, one-room spaces made with canvas and wood poles.



Figure 24. This is a photo of one style of canvas tent, set up as a display at Métis Crossing with some Métis household items. Métis Crossing, "Trapper's Tent." Courtesy of Métis Crossing, 2018.



Figure 25. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Canvas Tent at Métis Crossing." Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta, August 29, 2019.

Traditional Métis Homes

Throughout Métis history, Métis families have taken up farming and homesteading, in addition to mobile lifestyles. The homes and lives of Métis farming and homestead families reflected Métis family values and kinship traditions.³⁷

The home "was constructed of locally sourced logs that were hand hewn and often dovetail notched. The building of these homes was a social event and often many members of a community would lend a helping hand to construct the home."

—David Fortin, Jason Surkan, and Dani Kastelein, "Métis Domestic Thresholds and the Politics of Imposed Privacy," in Rebecca Kiddle, Luugigyoo Patrick Stewart, Kevin O'Brien, eds., *Our Voices: Indigeneity and Architecture* (California: ORO Editions, 2018).

^h These tents are often known as "Voyageur Tents," "Trapper's Tents," or "Prospector's Tents."



One of the main features of a Métis home was its open floor plan. It had no interior walls or separated rooms. The homes were usually one and a half or two stories high and had a cellar and/or exterior shack. The most common style of a Métis folk home featured the door centred on the face of the house, with two windows arranged symmetrically on either side of it. Rounded or squared white poplar or spruce logs created the main structure. The exterior walls were sealed with mud plaster, then often painted white.

The open floor plans lacked bounded, walled-off spaces for each person living in the home, and this reflects the Métis traditions of community and togetherness.³⁸ The environment of the Métis home allowed family members to take care of each other.



Figure 26. Interior of a Historical Métis Home at the site of Métis Crossing; David Fortin, Jason Surkan, and Dani Kastelein, "Métis Domestic Thresholds and the Politics of Imposed Privacy," in *Our Voices: Indigeneity and Architecture* (California: ORO Editions, 2018).

"[Métis] cultural methods of organization would be determined through kinship or by the age of the household member. For example, if a home had a second level, the younger children would sleep in the loft while older brothers and sisters, who required more privacy, had their own corner on the main floor along with other members of the family."

—Norman Fleury, quoted in David Fortin, Jason Surkan, and Dani Kastelein, "Métis Domestic Thresholds and The Politics of Imposed Privacy," in *Our Voices: Indigeneity and Architecture* (California: ORO Editions).

The Dovetail Technique

Métis builders were highly sought after throughout the Homeland for their construction talents, and specifically for their mastery of the **dovetail** technique. This building technique was a way of interlocking different types of wood to form reliable, sturdy constructions. As described in the quotation below, the Métis were especially acknowledged for their ability to construct sturdy homes with this method in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This technique remains a key symbol of Métis heritage and cultural expression today.

A broad axe was used to hew the tightly-fitting dovetail joints and square the logs so that they fit together. The Gladue father-and-son team used to do a lot of this work. Ed made 30 cents an hour building log houses with his father.

—Louise P. Horstman and David May, *Tired of Rambling: A History of Fishing Lake Metis Settlement* (Edmonton: Alberta Federation of Metis Settlement Associations, 1982), 49.



"My Great Grandfather Prosper Nault built his home in Thibeauville, Manitoba in the late 1800s. My mother wrote a French story of her visits to her Grandfather's farm. She described the homestead as having a timber frame structure. The spaces between the logs were filled with clay and straw mud plaster and the walls were whitewashed.

Prosper had a woodlot, so lumber was plentiful, but nails were expensive, so he built the home with dovetail and mortise & tenon joints and fastened them with wooden pegs."

—Norma Spicer, personal communication with Rupert's Island Institute, August 21, 2019.



Figure 27. The home in this photo was made using hewn logs, but many traditional houses were made with rounded logs.

Métis Nation of Alberta, "Krista Leddy at Métis Crossing."
Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta August 29, 2019.

Understanding the unique elements of Métis homes and of Métis home life can help educators support their students more effectively. Though Métis students in Albertan classrooms live in all kinds of homes, the culture of Métis homes often continues to reflect a sense of togetherness, where shared space is valued. This might be different from the home lives of other students in the classroom. Supporting the Métis tradition of community and togetherness will provide a more easily accessed, positive, encouraging classroom atmosphere for students.

People can experience a Métis home first-hand by visiting Métis Crossing, Alberta. Their Cultural Gathering Centre, opened in 2019–2020, reflects the core aspects of the Métis folk home introduced here.

As educators learn about the culture and traditions of their Métis students, they are encouraged to consider how the traditional Métis way of living is reflected in the design of Métis homes. As demonstrated here, the layout of a space can be empowering and a cultural experience in and of itself. As classroom and school leaders, educators can foster empowering classrooms that allow Métis students to flourish in a space where their cultural and traditional activities are welcomed and celebrated. To obtain support in this endeavour, educators are encouraged to reach out to the Rupert's Island Institute for resources and guidance.



Figure 28. Métis sod house and canvas tent. New Northwest Exploration Expedition tent set up beside "Blarney Castle," a log cabin near Ile a la Crosse, SK, September/October 1908. From the Frank J. P. Crean fonds.

Frank J.P. Crean, "Survey Tent," 1908, Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, S-B8956.



Métis River Lots

The Métis values of community, networking, and kinship are reflected spatially in the traditional ways in which they organized their communities. Many Métis across the Homeland took up agricultural lifestyles and adopted a unique way of organizing their land. Whereas English systems sought to impose a square grid pattern upon the land, Métis adapted the French river-lot system to organize their agricultural communities. Métis communities across the Homeland and into Alberta organized land lots in this way to allow for kinship and for communities to gather.³⁹

River lots are plots of land, one set apart for each family unit. At the time of distribution, a larger family would often receive a larger lot than a smaller family.⁴⁰ Like the river lots of Québec, **Métis river lots** were long and narrow to ensure that all members of the community had essential resources such as direct access to water, wood, space to farm, and transportation along the river and roads. No one family had a monopoly on a single resource. Instead, this system of land organization ensured that each family could care for themselves.

This way of organizing the community also fostered community across Métis kinship lines. By distributing the land in this way, Métis could build their homes close together, and day-to-day life could be shared. Often, fences were not used; rather, the land division followed natural features to delineate space.⁴¹

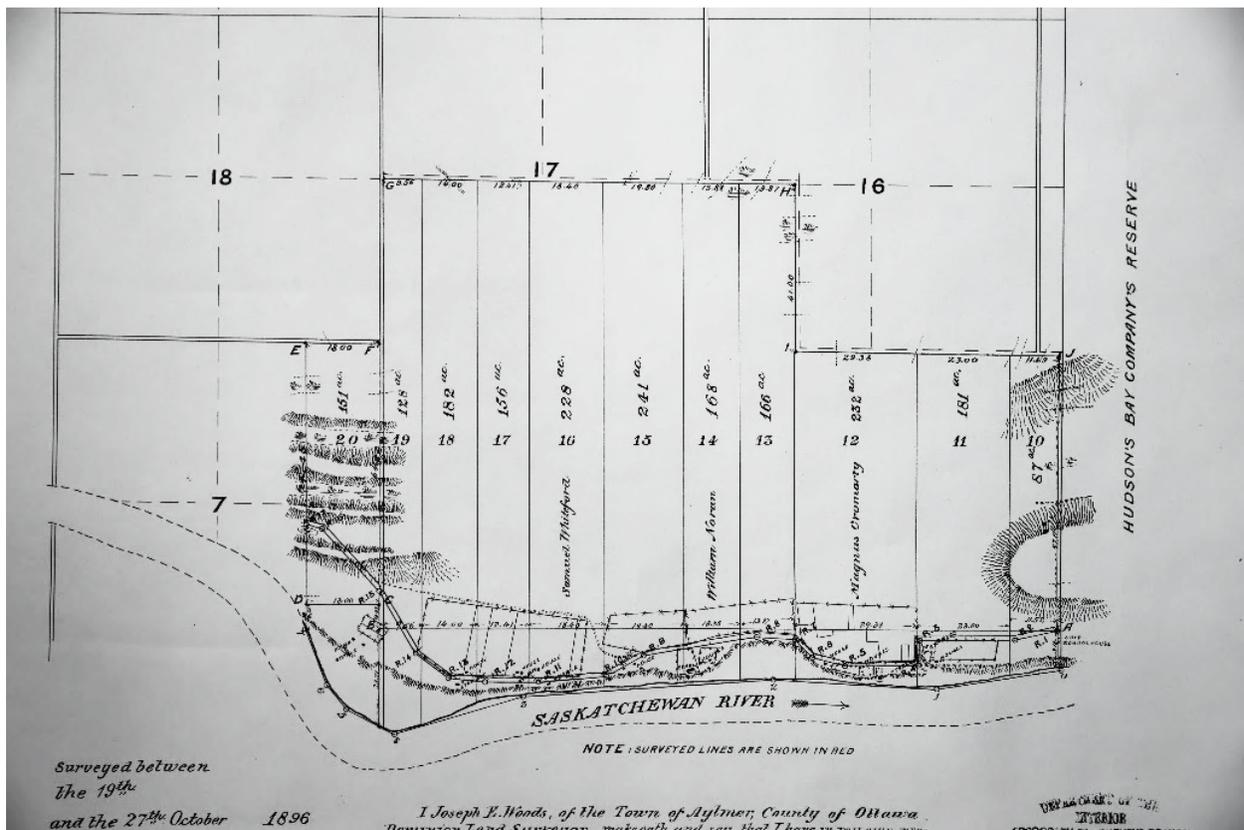


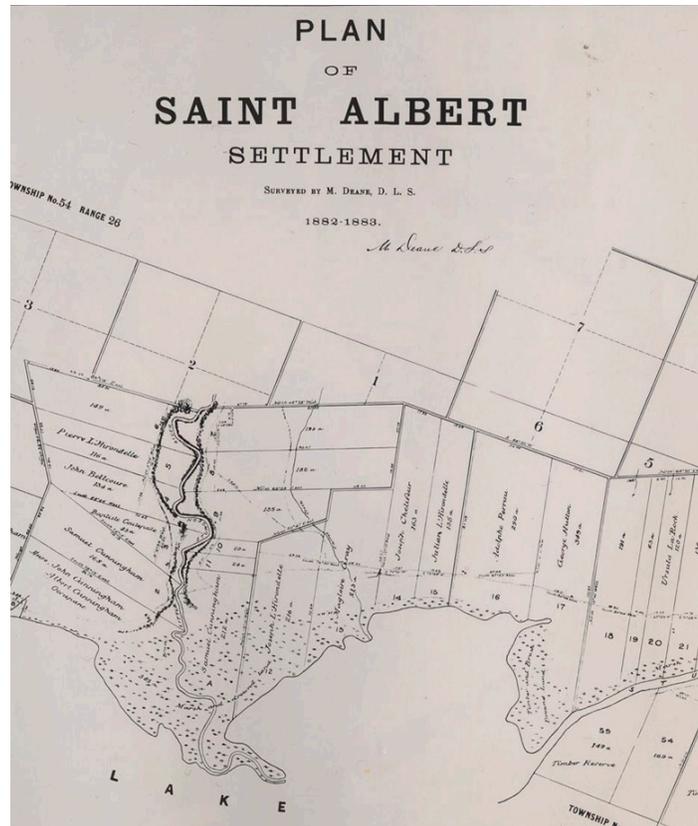
Figure 29. Plan of Victoria Settlement river lots.

Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta, November 21, 2019.



When mapped, land is delineated by river lot settlements, owned already by families as named in the map, along with an encroaching, square settlement style as charted by Canada's Department of the Interior. The Métis settled in various places, including what is now Saint Albert, Alberta, decades before the colonial **government** imposed their own way of viewing the land in this region. Other Métis communities organized this way included Edmonton, Calgary, and Peace River.

Figure 30. M. Deane, D.L.S., *Plan of Saint Albert Settlement, 1882-1883* [map]. Scale 1 inch – 20 chains (Ottawa: Department of the Interior, May 2, 1884).



Traditional Métis Transportation

Historically, Métis modes of transportation show the importance of the Métis to the early economic development of both the Métis Nation and their trading partners, such as Canada. Today, Métis use all forms of modern transport.

Red River Cart

The **Red River** cart is one of the most recognizable symbols of Métis culture and nationhood. The **Red River cart** served multiple purposes for communities, and it was a primary method of transportation across the Métis Homeland. A typical Red River cart was a box made of wooden railings attached to two large wheels and two shafts with which to attach it to an animal. The Red River cart was constructed entirely of wood, which was fastened together with sinew and/or rope. Even the pegs used on traditional Red River carts were made of wood.



Figure 31. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Red River Cart."
Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

One historical record reports "a new sort of cart which facilitates transportation, hauling home meat, etc. . . These carts carry about five pieces (of 90 pounds), and are drawn by one horse."

—Elliot Coues, ed., *The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and David Thompson, 1799–1814* (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines Inc., 1965), 191.



The versatility of the Red River cart was unlike that of any other cart of the time.⁴² The carts were easy to repair, as the construction materials, such as wood from trees or sinew from a hunt, were readily accessible en route. Another advantage of the Red River cart was that, because wood floats, the cart could travel across even deep water like rivers with ease. Many older Métis remember how the loud squealing noise created by the unlubricated axles could be heard for miles.⁴³

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 also carried **pemmican**, moccasins, decorated clothing, sugar, tobacco, weaponry, blankets, and many other trade goods. The carts were also used in resistance efforts, for transport and protection, and provided shelter during travel.

Métis developed a network of trails across the Homeland, and many of these routes are now Canadian highways. One of the most well-travelled routes in Alberta is now called the "Victoria Trail." This road followed a path of a historic trail that ran from Fort Edmonton to Fort Victoria and was part of a larger trail system known as the "Carlton Trail," which ran east as far as Fort Garry (Winnipeg). The trail had a variety of names, such as the "Yellowhead Trail," "Edmonton Trail," and the "Qu'Appelle Trail."

The Métis were responsible for the development of the versatile Red River cart used to transport goods over the prairie terrain.

—Lawrence Barkwell, "Red River Cart," 2018, http://www.ameriquefrancaise.org/en/article-59/Red_River_Cart.html.



Figure 32. "Campement métais, une charrette et un boeuf [Camp scene of Métis people, a Red River cart, and an ox]," Library and Archives Canada/Ministry of Interior Fonds C-001644; Lawrence Barkwell, "Charrette de la Rivière Rouge," *Encyclopédie du patrimoine culturel de l'Amérique française*, http://www.ameriquefrancaise.org/fr/article-58/Charrette_de_la_rivi%C3%A8re_Rouge.html.

Dog Sleds: Carioles and Sledges

In the winter, Métis used **carioles** and **sledges** to form single-file trains to transport up to four hundred pounds of both trade goods and people.⁴⁴

A sledge is an open-style **dog sled**, and a cariole (say: care-ee-ole) is an enclosed-style dog sled. Some sledges and carioles were actually Red River carts with their wheels removed.⁴⁵ Carioles and sledges were made with birch board panels and hide or canvas.



Figure 33. A Métis man in a cariole and his dog sled team. Photo: Charles Horetzky, *Dog Train & Carriole* [sic], Edmonton, Saskatchewan, 1872, Beach Old & Rare Books Collection, Library and Archives Canada, e011156712, <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/CollectionSearch/Pages/record.aspx?app=fonandcol&IdN umber=4820178&wbdisable=true>.



They were pulled by a team of dogs, which would often wear *li tapis* or **tuppies** (say: tuh-pee). Tuppies were small dog blankets, often decorated in the traditional Métis floral design with bright beads or embroidery and accented with wool, ribbons, and bells.

Figure 34. Lawrence J. Barkwell, Métis beadwork: Dog blankets (tapis), <https://www.scribd.com/document/45988394/Metis-Beadwork-Dog-Blankets-Tapis>.



Water Travel: Canoes, Kayaks, and York Boats



Figure 35. Humphrey Lloyd Hime, untitled, Humphrey Lloyd Hime/Bibliothèque et Archives Canada: 1936-273, http://www.ameriquefrancaise.org/en/article-488/M%C3%A9tis_Trails_of_Western_Canada_.html.

Métis used a variety of boats for water travel, including canoes, kayaks, and **York boats**.

The York boat is a large, shallow-water boat. It is said to have been invented by William Sinclair, a Métis man who was the chief tradesman with a crew of Métis men at York Factory, a Hudson's Bay Company headquarters in northern Manitoba. York boats can be rowed or sailed. They are designed for **portaging** and travelling across both deep and shallow waterways. Métis were often the main steersmen on York boats. A York boat can carry up to six tonnes of cargo. These boats were essential for transporting goods during the later years of the fur trade.⁴⁶



Figure 36. Walter Andreef, York Boat trip, 2013, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, 2018.

Walter Andreef, a Métis man in the Slave Lake area, shared his story of his recent York boat trip and his family's ancestral connection to the economy of this area involving York boats. He shared that one of his grandfathers, as a young man, was living in a winter storage space along the trade route, serving the travelling traders and fixing their boats on the river, before moving to Red River to join his Métis family there.

–Walter Andreef (Métis community member), personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, 2018.



Métis Artistic Traditions and Culture

Métis art is a cultural expression influenced by the experiences of Métis individuals and communities. Many Métis artists create work that expresses the history, identity, and joy of Métis communities.

This section provides a glimpse into the diverse range of Métis artistic styles that reflect the distinct traditions of the Métis story.

Recognizing Distinctly Métis Artistic Traditions

It is not uncommon for museums to display Métis creations but label them as generically “Indigenous” or as First Nations artefacts. It is problematic that Métis craftsmanship is not honoured in spaces designed to tell the story of the Métis. The fact that Métis are often not recognized for their artistic contributions points to a larger problem: that the Métis story is unknown and/or misunderstood. This dishonour may be unintentional; the curator of the museum may not have known the piece was made by a Métis person, but it is important that an effort be made to give appropriate credit to the artist. Taking a complacent approach to giving credit to Métis artists means taking a complacent approach to knowing and presenting the Métis story.

Scattered throughout fur trade journals and the diaries of adventures travelling across North America are descriptions of skilled Métis women who excelled at all aspects of needlework: sewing clothing and decorating the surfaces of hide and cloth with embroidery . . . and beadwork.

—Sherry Farrell Racette, “Stitching Beauty: Métis Beadwork,” in Gregory Scofield and Amy Briley, *Wâpikwanîy: A Beginner's Guide to Metis Floral Beadwork*. (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2011), 3.

As educators introduce their students to Métis art, they should think critically about which activities and stories most accurately tell the story of each community. Educating students via true stories, activities, and experiences—ones that are rooted in the culture of specific peoples—empowers students to develop deeper relationships with people of different cultures and communities.



Figure 37. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Beaded Infinity Hair Clip,” n.d., beads on leather. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



The Flower Beadwork People

Among the many names that were given to the Métis, one, the “flower beadwork people,” refers to the distinct tradition of floral beadwork in Métis communities across the Homeland. Métis were called the “flower beadwork people” because, by the 1850s, an emerging tradition of floral beadwork had become prominent in Métis creations.⁴⁷ Amongst the floral designs, traditional Métis beadwork designs have featured animals, birds, abstract shapes, and other geometric designs rooted in Métis ancestral heritages. Métis beadwork has decorated clothing, personal items, and other objects. Such items were used and worn by both Métis men and women for generations.⁴⁸



Figure 38. Connie Kulhavy, “Back to Batoche,” beads on fabric, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, July 2019.

Studies into the history of Métis art have shown that Métis styles of handiwork impacted the artistic styles of almost all of the Indigenous communities of Central and Western Canada.⁴⁹ It is clear that Métis artistic styles, and floral patterns in particular, originate from Red River, but scholars and art historians are looking to expand their understanding of the emergence and development of Métis artistic styles by locating records and artefacts across the nation. While the exact evolutionary path of floral beadwork styles has not yet been defined, the overwhelming consensus among scholars acknowledges the Métis origin of the distinct flower beadwork style.⁵⁰

A Cree man once spoke of flower beadwork, saying:

"In my youth, I had rarely seen beadwork. Back then, most decorations were made using porcupine quills. We never used floral designs, there were only geometric designs. Floral designs came to us from the Métis."

—Anonymous Cree man, sharing with anthropologist David Mandelbaum in 1934–35. Saskatchewan Archives Board, David Mandelbaum Field Notes (1934), Notebook 2, R-875, in Nathalie Kermaol, *Encyclopedia of French Cultural Heritage in North America*, [http://www.ameriquefrancaise.org/en/article-476/Floral Beadwork: A Métis Cultural Heritage to Rediscover .html](http://www.ameriquefrancaise.org/en/article-476/Floral%20Beadwork%3A%20A%20M%C3%A9tis%20Cultural%20Heritage%20to%20Rediscover.html).

Common Features of Traditional Métis Flower Beadwork Designs

- A central flower connected to many other flowers by stems
- Stems have "hairs" or "thorns"
- Designs include a variety of vines, buds, berries, leaves, and flowers
- Asymmetrical design

Can you spot the common features of traditional Métis beadwork in these items of traditional Métis design?



Figure 39. Traditional beadwork designs on mukluks, Métis Nation of Alberta Collection.

Photo: Billie-Jo Grant, January 2020, personal collection.



Métis Beading Traditions

Beading is one of the most widely recognized and celebrated Métis traditions. Once they became available through trade, beads quickly became a part of the artistry of Métis women. At first, larger beads were used for jewellery, but the beads were soon integrated into decorative creations with feathers and quills. By the 1850s, beads had become a primary medium of artistry and decoration for Métis women, from young girls to great-great-grandmothers.⁵¹ As descendants of these first Métis women artists, Métis people today see the pride their **foremothers** took in their work. Today's Métis also admire the resourcefulness of these women, especially in how they used and reused materials for diverse purposes.

There was, and is, no perfect, single way to bead. Traditional items and contemporary creations are and were made in a variety of ways. Close examination of historical Métis beaded creations reveals that some Métis women would thread their beads directly onto sinew without a beading needle, which was then tacked down in the shape of the design.

When you pick up the needle to learn beadwork, you are picking up a thread that connects you to generations of artists who came before you, and claiming their rich artistic tradition as your own.

—Gregory Scofield and Amy Briley, *Wâpikwaniy*, 5.



Figure 40. Métis traditionally beaded purse with button, n.d., Métis Nation of Alberta Collection.

Photo: Billie-Jo Grant, January 2020, personal collection.

"Years ago many of our ancestors were not able to write. Stories and knowledge were beaded or embroidered into clothing and items of everyday use. As they drew the design, they told the story of the plant."

—Rose Richardson, quoted in Christi Belcourt, *Medicines to Help Us: Traditional Métis Plant Use* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2007), xii.

Métis Embroidery Traditions

Embroidery is the creation of decorative artwork using silk or cotton threads. Métis women often preferred to embroider with silk thread because it was shiny and very useful for creating intricate designs.⁵² 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**.

Figure 41. Métis Nation of Alberta, Garipy embroidered pouch, n.d., Métis Nation of Alberta Collection.

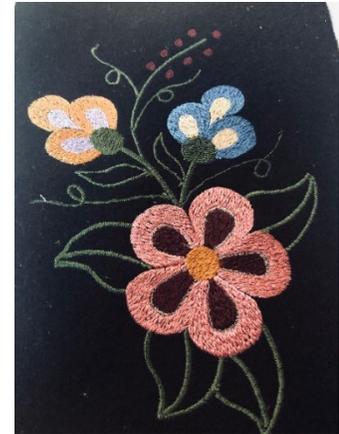
Photo: Billie-Jo Grant, January 2020, personal collection.



Métis embroidery patterns, like beadwork, evince the distinctive Métis floral design. A special embroidery technique involves three-dimensional layering, with the focal point always at the centre of the flowers. Stems, flower buds, leaves, and berries, like in floral beadwork, remain key features of the design.

Figure 42. Métis embroidery style, Métis Nation of Alberta Collection.

Photo: Billie-Jo Grant, January 2020, personal collection.



Contemporary Métis Artistic Practices

Métis artists decorate lives with the stories and traditions of Métis culture. This short exposition is intended to provide an opportunity for educators to encounter Métis artistry and reflect on how contemporary Métis artisans continue to explore Métis culture and traditions.

Throughout this section, please note how the core Métis values of kinship, adaptability, and resilience are evident in contemporary Métis art.

"I'm a Métis artist—Not all my work is Métis-themed, but it is inspired by my people. It's the backbone, my culture."

—Stephen Gladue, Métis community member, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, 2019.

Quillwork

When Métis adopted the quillwork traditions, they began using it in their own expressions of their culture, such as the flower beadwork patterns. Soon after, the tradition of quillwork was shared through generations of Métis, with artistic adaptations that demonstrate Métis identity and creativity. Métis quillwork uses vibrant colours and bold expressions to symbolize celebration and enjoyment of life.⁵³



Some of the first influences of quillwork and geometric designs in Métis creations have been found in work from the 1820s.⁵⁴ Some scholars have noted that Métis women and girls, as a consequence of contact with nuns in schools, developed distinct quillwork styles which were interwoven with European embroidery techniques.⁵⁵

Traditionally, porcupine quills were arranged by size and then coloured using vegetable dyes made from moss, roots, plants, and/or bark mixed with water and acid, sourced from berries, urine, and wood ash. Today, many artists use artificial dyes to colour their quills.

Figure 43. Melissa-Jo Belcourt, *Porcupine Quill on Bark*, n.d., quill on birch bark, https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/edmonton_archives/indigenous-artist-in-residence-program.aspx .



Fish Scale Art

Fish scale art is a relatively new Métis art form. Fish scale artists harvest and dye fish scales by hand and then arrange the scales to create beautiful imagery.

Though not a historical Métis tradition, fish scale art is certainly a celebrated artistic practice in Métis communities today.

Figure 44. Métis Nation of Alberta, Métis fish scale art. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta August 29, 2019.



Tufting

Tufting is a beautiful technique used to create soft, three-dimensional flowers and leaves. When tufting, the artist pulls a small bunch of moose hair under a loop stitch and fastens it. The hairs are then fanned out on all sides and are trimmed to create a small, smooth, round tuft.

Using dyed moose and caribou hair in decorative arts is not new to Métis, but tufting itself is a relatively new Métis art form. Métis women Katherine Bouvier (née Beaulieu) and Madeleine Lafferty (née Bouvier) of Fort Providence invented this technique in the early 1900s.⁵⁶ Members of Métis communities near Fort Simpson, NWT, remember the emergence of tufting in their community as early as the 1920s.⁵⁷ Tufting quickly caught on in Métis and non-Métis communities, and is today used in a variety of different ways.

"The traditional part about it is the flowers we make. We are the flower people, we like our flowers and yes, we like to attach and make pictures on the wall and it always represents the flowers for us. That's one we can't get away from, that traditional flower."

—Lilyrose Meyers, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, August 29, 2019.



Figure 45. Amy Malbeuf, "Tufting," Mentoring Artists for Women's Art, n.d., <https://mawa.ca/workshops/view/tufting-with-amy-malbeuf>.

Rug Hooking

Rug hooking is a cultural expression that continues to be popular among Métis families today. Rugs of many sizes are decorated with colourful floral designs with round leaves and **tendrils**. Métis rug hooking artists make rugs by using a rug hooking tool and thin strips of old t-shirts, looping the strips through burlap or jute. Métis hooked rugs have been sold in stores, and some Métis families recount how they traded rugs with farmers for food items. Rug hooking is another example of how Métis cultural arts were essential to the fabric of Métis life.⁵⁸

"I grew up with rug hooking, it was something that was there, a part of our family. My mother would do it. We were never taught that it was cultural, it was just there."

—Billie-Jo Grant, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, August 20, 2019.



Contemporary Artistic Expressions

Throughout Métis generations, Métis artists have developed important pieces of material culture that has strengthened their families and communities as a whole. Items have included patchwork quilts, traded blankets, pillowcases, doilies, and knitted socks.



Figures 46. Métis Nation of Alberta, Marlene Lanz patchwork. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta, November 2019.



Figure 47. Bev New, knitted socks, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, November 2019.



Figure 48. Bev New, patchwork quilt, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, November 2019.

Métis artists today use non-traditional artistic mediums such as painting and digital design to tell the Métis story and to reflect Métis traditions. The few examples that follow give educators a glimpse into how traditional practices can be expressed in contemporary mediums. Notice how the beadwork traditions are reflected in these painted pieces by Métis artists from Alberta.



Figure 50. This vase uses the beadwork painting technique to represent the Métis culture and relationship to the water and rocks. It is rendered in painted dots meant to recall Métis beading traditions.



Figure 49. Christi Belcourt is a Métis artist from *Manitou Sakhigan* (Lac Ste. Anne). Her work is world-renowned, presenting the Métis story and identity in beautiful ways to the global community. This image is a digital copy of her acrylic painting.

Christi Belcourt, *Inward*, September 16, 2014, <http://christibelcourt.com/beadwork-style/inward/>.

Tawatinâ Bridge Art Project, David Garneau, *Vase*, Art10, Edmonton Arts Council and Darrell Bell Gallery, 2017, "Artist David Garneau to Create 400 Paintings for Edmonton's Tawatinâ Bridge – UPDATE," <https://www.gallerieswest.ca/news/artist-david-garneau-to-create-400-paintings-for-edmonton%E2%80%99s/>.

Also note how Métis history and identity, including the value of resilience, is reflected in the digital art of Stephen Gladue.

Figure 51. Stephen Gladue, *Nation Building*, digital art, n.d., photo given to Rupertsland Institute.





Métis Musical Traditions

Métis gatherings would be incomplete without lively music. Music is an essential aspect of the Métis story. In Métis gatherings small and large, people sing old songs and play old tunes; singing and playing songs form part of the Métis oral tradition. The Métis today enjoy vibrant, dynamic musical forms that draw from traditional and non-traditional conventions.

Traditional Instruments: The Fiddle and More

At a traditional Métis party, musicians use fiddles and spoons to create a quick beat for people to dance to. Métis music also sometimes includes guitars, banjos, accordions, combs, and **mouth harps**.⁵⁹

The mouth harp "fits perfectly in the hand. They would also carve out a mouthpiece from which they blew and plucked the strings to make different tones."

—Vi Sanderson, "The Fiddle: A Gift to le' Metis," *New Breed* 17, no. 7 (1982): 19.

The mouth harp is made by finding a willow, carving it into a curve with a knife, then tying several wet sinew strings tightly on either end.⁶⁰

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.⁶¹ Similar to the culture of storytelling, fiddle tunes and songs 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. Fiddlers are cultural ambassadors for the Métis community; every time they play, they invite people of every background into a Métis traditional experience.⁶² All Métis communities, and even most families, have at least one person who can play the fiddle. The Métis community celebrates fiddlers of all ages. Some Métis fiddlers are famous, enjoying a status in Métis communities similar to The Tragically Hip in Canadian communities.



Figure 52. Prince Charles fiddlers, Concordia Endowment announcement, September 2018, Rupertsland Institute.

To play the Red River Jig, "the bottom string is often tuned up a tone from G to A. It is based on **syncopation** and extra beats, which give the music a 'bounce' when played and heard. The music is typically played up-tempo and has a routine back beat. These features make the performance of waltzes and reels distinctive, and particularly suitable for dancing."

—Louis Riel Institute, "Music and Dance," 2019, <http://www.louisrielinstitute.com/music-a-dance.php>, bolding added



Figure 53. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Playing the Spoons,” 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Most often, the clap of spoons or the drumming of rhythms on large tin pans accompanies the Métis fiddle. It was also common for the fiddle players to provide rhythm with heels and toe taps. This syncopation and the extra beats give the music with its routine back beat a “bounce” that is particularly suitable for jigging and dancing. The Métis used wooden and later metal spoons reversed and held back to back between the fingers as a rhythm instrument. Slapping the spoons on the thigh and on the other hand produces a rhythm. Two rib bones have also been used in the place of spoons.



Figure 54. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Donny L'Hirondelle performing,” Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta. n.d.



Figure 55. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Métis Men Performing,” 2018. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

“When [my cousin came] to Batoche she said to me that she got me another rattle snake tail. When I got my pickup in Prince Albert during Batoche days, this one guy asked as a joke 'do you have a rattle snake tail in there?' I said yes, and [he] looked at me and said 'really.' He couldn't believe it. The old Métis people, a lot of time put a rattle snake tail in their fiddle.”

—Albert (Hap) Boyer, “Albert (Hap) Boyer Interview,” interview by Gabriel Dumont Institute, Friday October 5, 2001, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/06748.Boyer,%20/'Hap/'%20Albert.pdf>.



Figure 56. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Homer Poitras performing,” Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta, n.d.



Traditional Métis Songs and Tunes

Métis songs have lyrics that express different aspects of life to the quick-beat fiddle tune. Not all Métis music has lyrics, however; some of the most famous traditional Métis tunes tell the Métis story, and bring the community together, without words. The songs that do have lyrics are often **multilingual**, combining English, French, Cree, Ojibway, and Michif languages, depending on the region of the family.

Joe Venne would title his French songs in English so that English-speakers would know what the lyrics were about when they heard the song.

—Lynn Whidden, “Metis Music,” in *Metis Legacy: A Metis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography*, eds. Lawrence J. Barkwell, Leah Dorion, and Darren R. Préfontaine (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications and Winnipeg: Louis Riel Institute, 2001), 173.

A unique quality of Métis music is that it developed in a culture that treasures oral tradition.⁶³ Tunes were not written down, but, like stories, they were passed down in person, from one musician to another. Métis songs are meant to be heard, and they are meant to inspire movement. Many Métis songs have never been systematically documented with written lyrics or rhythmic notations, as is conventional in **Euro-Canadian** music.

"[T]his 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, interviewed by Herb Lafferty (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, November 17, 2001).

Métis songs are dynamic and flexible, and the music is easily alterable to suit the occasion, audience, dancers, and the creative ear of the musician. Métis tunes have unique metering and phrasing systems, which may seem unpredictable to people more familiar with Euro-Canadian music. Traditional Métis songs are malleable—that is, they lack a fixed structure. As such, inscribing them in standard musical notations fixes the tune in a way that takes away some of its dynamism. Some Métis music is now being transcribed into a written form, but it is important to the Métis that their songs also remain dynamic, lived experiences, as they always have been.⁶⁴ Some Métis music and songs are now being translated using these conventions.



Featured Métis Songs

This is an excerpt from the Métis Anthem, recognized as official by the Métis Nation of Alberta. The anthem is sung at various gatherings and tells the story of Métis nationhood and resilience.

—Clint Buehler, Dennis Charney.
“Proud to be Métis,” Métis Nation of Alberta, n.d.,
<http://albertametis.com/culture/anthem/>.

Métis Anthem

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 heroes now called traitors, and courageous deeds now past.
But their spirit was not broken, and their dreams never died. . .

For this newest generation, and the future ones to come.
With the past to motivate us, it will help to keep us strong
As we build the Métis Nation, as we watch it rise again
Our past loss is motivation, to inspire our future gain

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

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

Chanson de la Grenouillère

"Voulez-vous écouter chanter/Une chanson de vérité?/Le dix-neuf de juin la bande des **Bois-Brulés**/Sont arrivé comme des brave guerriers.

En arrivant à la Grenouillère/Nous avons pris trois prisonniers/Trois prisonniers des Arkany's/Qui sont ici pour piller notre pays.

Étant sur la point de débarquer/Deux de nos gens se sont mis a crier/Deux de nos gens se sont mis a crier/Voila l'Anglais qui vient nous attaquer!

Tout aussitôt nous avons deviré/Nous avons été les rencontrer/J'avons cerné la bande des grenadiers/(Ils) sont immobiles, ils sont demontés.

J'avons agi comme des gens d'honneur/J'avons envoyé un ambassadeur: « Le Gouverneur, voulez-vous arrêter/Un petit moment, nous voulons vous parler? »

Le Gouverneur qui était enragé/Il dit a ses soldats : « Tirez! »/Le premier coup, c'est l'anglais qu' a tiré; /L'ambassadeur a manqué de tuer.

Le Gouverneur qui se croit empereur/Il veut agir avec rigueur/Le Gouverneur qui se croit empereur/À son malheur, agit trop de rigueur."

This is an excerpt of “Chanson de la Grenouillère.” This is a song referencing one of the first and most prominent national resistance movements of the Métis. It's remembered by other communities as the Battle of Seven Oaks. Read more about the Victory of Frog Plain in the foundational knowledge document *Homeland History*.

This song's creation is credited to Pierre Falcon, who is fondly remembered as a Métis maker of songs by many Métis people. Falcon did not record his songs in writing, so determining the most accurate version of the song has proven complex. The version we share above is said to have been transcribed by Pierre Picton for Margaret Complin's publication of the document in 1938. Monique Giroux identifies the complexities interweaving political biases influencing these transcriptions in her article referenced below.

Monique Giroux, “Singing for Frog Plain,” *Ethnologies* 37, no.1 (2015): 55. Bolding added.



By providing students an opportunity to experience Métis culture through traditional Métis music, educators will help them engage with the Métis values of resilience, adaptability, mobility, and kinship. Inviting a Métis fiddle teacher in to provide a lesson in Métis music is an excellent way to allow students to experience how learning via oral tradition differs from learning in the written tradition. Educators could even ask if any students know how to play the fiddle or if they recognize any of the songs. Lynn Whidden shares an important note that should not be forgotten.

The Métis gathered frequently in family homes to sing, tell stories, dance, and play instruments. . . Everyone was encouraged to participate and there was no correct version of a song. The songs were full of humor and celebrated life, even the bad times. Our wish is that you will enjoy the songs in the very same way!

—Lynn Whidden, “Metis Music,” in *Metis Legacy*, 173.

In Euro-Canadian culture, songs and tunes often have a precise, “correct” version. Educators are mandated to help students learn Eurocentric musical conventions and in doing so perpetuate a culture of “correctness of song.” When sharing Métis tunes and songs, it is important that educators also share the open, free quality of Métis musical structures, so that students can authentically experience the conventions of Métis music.

When Frank Poitra, a Métis man from Dunseith, North Dakota was asked, “What do you see in your head when you’re playing a tune?”

He replied, “I see the dancers”

—Frank Poitra, in *Medicine Fiddle*, directed by Michael Loukinen (1991; Up North Films), <http://www.folkstreams.net/film-detail.php?id=178>.



Figure 57. Brianna Lizotte, a Métis youth from Alberta, plays and teaches about the fiddle provincially and nationally.

Métis Nation of Alberta, “Brianna Lizotte playing the fiddle,” n.d. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Brianna Lizotte, a Métis fiddle teacher, reflected on teaching the fiddle to classes of students:

“I notice that some teachers really like to have their kids serious and taking this seriously, but something I wish that teachers and parents would know is that it’s about having fun, not about just the teaching aspect, but it’s also just about enjoying the music. If a child doesn’t like it, then they don’t have to be [in the] fiddle lessons.”

—Brianna Lizotte, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, August 29, 2019.



Métis Dance

Many Métis stories, historically and today, feature lively gatherings where the Métis dance with passion, whether in large gatherings in the community or in smaller gatherings in family homes. Mervin Desjarlais, a member of the Métis community in Caslan, Alberta, shared about the dances in his community. In his story, he describes how everyone was welcome to join in the house dances at any time. This welcoming, open culture is an expression of Métis ways of kinship.

“I enjoyed house dances, which were held quite often. The music was always supplied by the local people. They sang, played [instruments], and danced very well. Although no alcohol, or very little, was consumed at these house dances, everyone had a good time. . . . I liked living here where people could get to visit each other and we were always welcome at any time.”

—Mervin Desjarlais, in Verbicky, ed., *Life and Times of the Metis*, 44.



Figure 58. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Kids dancing at Métis Crossing,” July 25, 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

The most traditional dance that the Métis perform is the **Red River Jig**. Other Métis dances include the Duck Dance, the Broom Dance, and the Sash Dance. See the word cloud above for the names of other well-known Métis dances and fiddle tunes.

Many Métis communities have a caller for the dances. Callers are individuals who, amidst the music and noise, call out the instructions of the dance as they perform. Dancers would have to listen as they danced.

The traditional Métis jig has been passed on from one generation to the next and has survived through numerous periods of difficulty. Métis dances truly express the stamina of the community, and its ability to endure and celebrate life even during difficult times.

—Métis Nation of Alberta, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, December 18, 2019.



The Red River Jig

Métis created the Red River Jig over a century ago. The Red River Jig predates the creation of Manitoba.⁶⁵ This famous dance is performed to the beat of the Red River Jig fiddle tune.⁶⁶ The dance is taught and shared among Métis **kinscapes**,ⁱ and individual Métis communities add their own fancy steps to certain segments of the dance. It is a fascinating dance to watch and a fun dance to participate in.



Figure 59. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Métis child jiggging at Métis Crossing,” n.d. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

In 1930, a Mr. Genthon wrote to the Winnipeg Free Press claiming that he had composed the Red River Jig. Challenged by Mr. Genthon, Patrick Pronteau stated in the newspaper that he had been present at a wedding in 1860 where Mr. Macdallas, the fiddler for the occasion, as part of the festivities, played a new jig which he had composed. Father Brocher christened it the "Red River Jig."

–David Bolton, “The Red River Jig,” *Manitoba Pageant*, 7, no. 1 (Sept. 1961), <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/pageant/07/redriverjig.shtml>.

Red River Jig competitions happen today across Canada. The objective of these competitions is to have fun and to attain perfect shuffling in a variety of steps, with as little upper body movement as possible.



Métis Child and Family Jiggers are an Alberta Métis jiggging group who perform at many Métis celebrations. In this picture, they are performing at the 2016 Métis Spring Festival in St. Albert.

Figure 60. John Copley, “2016 Metis Spring Festival in St. Albert Draws Record Numbers,” *Alberta Native News*, June 26, 2016, <http://www.albertanativenews.com/2016-metis-spring-festival-in-st-albert-draws-record-numbers/>.

ⁱ Kinscape: Referencing the expansive network of relationships amongst the Métis Homeland between the Métis people and the land itself. Kinscapes are a foundational component of Métis nationhood and governance.



Métis Storytelling Traditions

Storytelling is a rich aspect of Métis life. Métis storytelling is shared in both oral tradition and literature.

Oral Tradition

Storytelling is an educational practice. Sharing the collection of historical accounts that recount the Métis common experience serves to define the identity of a community and family. Storytelling is integral to the knowledge translation of Métis ways of knowing and being, and it is essential to sharing language and culture from one generation to the next. Métis stories have provided clarity to the Métis throughout the generations of mistruths **propagated** about the Métis Nation. Stories are told not only to share facts or communicate events. Stories also serve to entertain, teach important lessons, give instructions, share spiritual experiences, express beliefs, foster pride in Métis identity, and share the history of the family and community. Stories and teasing are social practices that build relations. When Métis people gather, there is a good chance that stories will be shared—at home, in the community, at parties, around the campfire, and often at **wakes**.^j

"Being raised by my Grandmother in the Lac La Biche area, I often attended wakes with her when I was a child. Kinship was important to her generation, so, making sure she had her rosary beads with her, we travelled to pay our respects whether it was for family or friends. More often it was family in some way as most Métis in our community seemed to be related through blood or connected through marriage. Back then wakes were held in people's houses and a two-night wake was the tradition. While the children such as I fell asleep in the back rooms prayers were still being said by the adults in the front rooms and stories were told throughout the night as they kept watch on their vigil with the coffin."

—Terry Boucher, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, August 27, 2019.

Features of Métis Oral Traditions

Appreciating Métis oral traditions requires understanding Métis languages, the storyteller, and the narrative of the story itself.

Languages

Métis stories are best experienced and understood when shared in the Métis language the story originated in. For example, if a story was told in Cree, the essence may be lost when translated to English, Michif, or French. Using Cree, French, and/or Michif languages to tell a story allows listeners to experience the language and perceive what aspects of the story the Métis storyteller is emphasizing. Some concepts and experiences cannot be fully articulated in English. Stories often include specific words that, when told in their original language, express a multitude of connections and connotations. This depth of meaning can be lost when the words are translated into English.

"The stories are said to be 'not as funny' in English as they are in Cree or in Michif."

—Peter Bakker, "When the Stories Disappear, Our People Will Disappear. . .," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 8, no. 4 (1996): 30–45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20739369>.

^j A wake is a gathering where friends and family of a deceased person share stories, memories, food, and support and say their goodbyes. Wakes are so named because, traditionally, a family member stays awake all night with the body of the deceased.



Storytellers

Métis storytellers can be anyone in Métis communities. Storytellers are often among older Métis, as well as children who can also hold this unique gift. Storytellers can be community historians, and the stories they pass on would have been told for many generations. Individuals are generally not appointed as storytellers, but, rather, storytellers emerge organically in communities.⁶⁷

Some storytellers were called *raconteurs*. They tell "funny stories, that sound really serious, but then all of a sudden it's a joke!"

—Métis Nation of Alberta Culture Team, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, September 10, 2019.

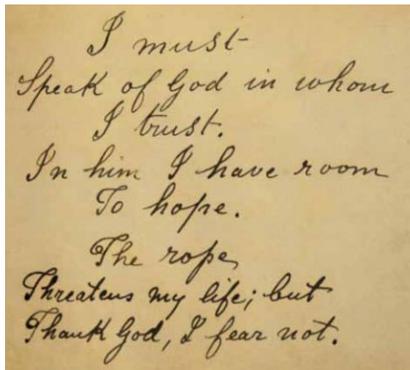
Types of Stories

There are many types of stories told in Métis families and communities. Personal stories that share aspects of resilience and survival often include humour. Métis people have relied on humour to navigate painful experiences and trauma. A good story includes lots of laughter, joking, and teasing that builds character. It is not uncommon to hear someone shout "Acimo!" (say: ah-chee-mo) which in Cree means "Tell a story."

"A tall tale can also be complete fiction right from the start, e.g., a legend or a historical tale, or something so absurd that the audience immediately knows it's just a story, but what all tall tales have in common is that they are told with such conviction that the audience hangs on to every word.

Louis Bellrose is famous in our Métis community for his tall tales but it is so much fun to watch others challenge him by embellishing on his yarn or telling a new one that has us in stitches."

—Norma Spicer, personal communication with Rupertsland Institute, August 29, 2019.



Written Storytelling Traditions

Métis storytelling in writing also has historical roots. One of these traditions is the written expression of Métis resilience. Writers from the 1800s onwards include stories of the resilient Métis people and Nation.⁶⁸ Some of the most recognized writers in Métis history include **Louis Riel**, Pierre Falcon, and James Brady.

Figure 61. Louis Riel was one of the first recognized Métis authors. Pictured here is one of his final poems from 1885.

Glen Campbell, "The Political Poetry of Louis Riel: A Semiotic Study," *Canadian Poetry* no. 3. (1978): 14–25.



Métis Sports and Games

The games and sports the Métis play are an essential component of communal life. Métis often gathered after church on Sundays to socialize, play a variety of games, and eat together—some still do.⁶⁹

Games & Activities

Some of the popular games Métis children grew up playing are common across Canada, including tag, hide-and-go-seek, hop-scotch, and simple fun such as jumping in leaves or sliding down a hill in winter with whatever was handy or nearby. None of these games required equipment; they can be played by anyone, anywhere. Many of the games below aided in a child's development of fine motor skills and coordination.



Other games include toys and strings. A buzzer is a string toy created by threading a string through two holes in a button or wooden disk. Then the ends of the string are tied together to form a loop. The buzzer is wound by tightly winding the string on both sides of the button, and then the child pulls on both ends of the loop. The button spins rapidly and makes a sound. Kids get creative, making unique buzzer pieces that make different pitches and sounds. **Cat's Cradle** is another string game that is still common today. In this game, string is looped around multiple fingers to create designs.

Other common games are slingshots, jacks, marbles, pick up sticks, jump rope, paper dolls, and paper horses.

Another game is called **Ring and Pin**.⁷⁰ The game is played using an object with one or more holes in it attached to a pointed piece. The game pieces for Ring and Pin can be simple (such as a stick and ring) or complex (some games have objects between the ring and stick, or multiple rings to catch). The general objective of the game is to get your pin into the hole(s) using only one hand.



At community events today, like at **Back to Batoche Days** and Voyageur Days at Métis Crossing, people participate in Voyageur Games, strength games such as **caber**/log tossing and flour sack carrying races, hatchet throwing, and knife games. These games are aimed at focusing on the strength and accuracy skills that traditionally helped in hunter training.

Figure 62. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Strong Man Games at Voyageur Days," August 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



Horse racing is also a very popular activity, as it reflects the importance of horses in Métis people's lives. Historically, races were held on roads in the summer. In the winter, races could be held on frozen rivers. There were also rodeo-style events such as chariot races, bareback riding, and chuckwagon races. These types of events are still popular. The Kikino Silver Birch Rodeo and the Calgary Stampede are popular events many Métis people enjoy today.

Figure 63. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Back to Batoche," July 24, 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Métis Sports Activities

The competitive Métis spirit has long inspired many Métis to participate in sports from around the world. Métis communities in Alberta have developed sport leagues for their children and communities. Métis men and women have represented Canada as gold-winning Olympic champions.⁷¹ Throughout all levels and types of sports in Canada, Métis are some of the highest-performing athletes out there.



Figure 64 Métis Nation of Alberta, "MNA Junior Novice Hockey Team – Native Provincials 2016," 2016, <http://albertametis.com/photos/2016-2/mna-junior-novice-hockey-team-native-provincials-2016/>.



Figure 65. Ball games such as the one pictured have been bringing the Métis community together for many years. Gabriel Justin Bourque, often called Uncle Jeep, was one of the greatest umpires known in the community.

Courtesy of Lisa Cruickshank, "Uncle Jeep as the famous umpire," n.d., personal collection.



Faith Traditions

Religion and **spirituality** have long been important components of Métis culture. Métis scholars have pointed out that historical beliefs in Métis communities are “an important but neglected area of study,”⁷² so this piece is meant only to give a glimpse into Métis faith traditions. The aim of this section is to strengthen educators’ understandings of the complexity of Métis religious traditions in Alberta, as well as to empower readers with a more respectful position when approaching the topic of Métis faith traditions.

Historical Faith Traditions

Historically, Christianity was one of the most prominent religious traditions in Métis communities. Christianity was an important part of Métis life before Christian **missions** were established in the western prairies. Métis people also worked to establish various Christian denominations in their regions. As Métis communities moved, whether by choice or by force, it was important that a church be established in the new community, headed by a priest, minister, or missionary.⁷³ The Catholic Church was the most prominent Christian church in Métis communities in Alberta. Anglican and Methodist churches were also prominent.⁷⁴

Researchers have shown that Métis faith traditions are rooted in the experienced values and needs of the community. Métis faith traditions are part of a “lived religion.” Métis beliefs and ceremonial faith traditions are lived out in daily practice. The practices of Métis Christians/Catholics might differ from those of traditional Western Christianity/Catholicism. The lived experiences of Métis religion may display differences due to personal engagements and interpretations that reflect Métis values and worldview.⁷⁵

Lac Ste. Anne Pilgrimage

The Lac Ste. Anne **Pilgrimage** is a longstanding religious and spiritual tradition for Métis in Alberta. Catholic and non-Catholic Métis uphold this annual gathering of their communities. Since 1889, Métis have made an annual pilgrimage to Lac Ste. Anne, also called **Manitou Sakahigan** (say: man-ih-too sah-gye-hih-gahn). This name is most commonly understood by Métis to be a translation from Cree meaning “God’s Lake.”⁷⁶ This community is approximately 80 kilometres northwest of Edmonton. Pilgrims, which include members of Métis, First Nations, and settler communities, come for Lac Ste. Anne’s renowned healing powers.⁷⁷ An annual week-long pilgrimage in July includes Masses for a number of different Indigenous communities in their respective languages.



Figure 66. Peggy Symon, “People walking near the shore during the Lac Ste. Anne pilgrimage,” circa 1926, Provincial Archives of Alberta, object no. A15459.

Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Alberta.



Métis families have lived in and around the Lac Ste. Anne area since the early 1800s. This spiritually renowned location has also become a hub for the Métis to gather for economic opportunities such as trade and kinship-based networking. It is important to note that there is a cemetery where many Métis people are buried.

In 1841, Alexis Piché Sr., a Metis who lived in the area, traveled to St. Boniface to ask that priests be sent to live among them. Even though priests were scarce, Bishop Provencher sent Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault, who was a Cree speaker, to check things out. Gabriel Dumont Sr., the uncle of Gabriel Dumont of Batoche fame, guided him to Lac St. Anne.

—Lawrence Barkwell, “Lac St. Anne, Alberta,” Louis Riel Institute, January 10, 2014,
<http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/14462.Lac%20St.Anne.pdf>.

Honouring Diversity within Contemporary Métis Community

As with all aspects of Métis culture, Métis spirituality is diverse and multifaceted. Some Métis describe their beliefs and experiences as religious, ceremonial, or spiritual; whereas other Métis describe their beliefs as family traditions and practices.

Educators need to know that personal, family, and community experiences are important indicators of how religion is practiced among the individual Métis and their families.⁷⁸ As educators work to build an honouring, welcoming environment, the best approach is to build a relationship with your Métis students and get to know what their families might need from you.

Traditional First Nations ceremonies and teachings have often been used as an umbrella experience for all Indigenous students. While the inclusion of First Nations ceremonies in a traditionally non-Indigenous atmosphere is a positive step toward reconciliation for Alberta schools with their First Nations community members, it needs to be understood that Métis students and families may not practice these traditions.

It is not wise to simply state that all First Nations [nor Indigenous] peoples subscribe to the same belief system and adhere to the same values. Such a description promotes a view of [pan-Indigenous] spirituality, which did not necessarily exist in the past.

—Darren Préfontaine, Todd Paquin, and Patrick Young, *Métis Spirituality* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2003), 6.

In educational settings that include First Nations spiritual traditions, it is essential that Métis students be given the background knowledge that, traditionally, when the Métis Nation was formed, most families were practicing Catholics. However, some Métis people practice spiritual traditions such as **smudging**, drumming, and participating in sweats and/or pipe ceremonies. Spirituality is an individual choice.

When engaging with the Métis community, it is important for educators to ask the individual if they require any protocol for coming in to do a prayer or to speak on behalf of the Métis Nation or Métis community, as this is also an individual choice.



Métis Medicinal Practices

Métis people have used different plants in a variety of ways to make medicine. Using plants to care for the body was at one time the only way Métis treated medical conditions.⁷⁹ The knowledge of the purpose and method of using traditional medicines is shared within and between families. Sometimes, there were certain people in the community who held special knowledge of plants to whom others would go for advice. This person is trusted with the knowledge and skills needed to prepare and create medicines. For some Métis, medicinal traditions continue today as a way of being, whereas others today rely primarily on Western health practices.

Métis traditional knowledge, traditional health knowledge and healing practices are based upon a foundation of Métis culture and viewed by Métis to be fundamental to Métis health and contribute to individual well-being and community wellness.

—Lois Edge and Tom McCallum, “Métis Identity: Sharing Traditional Knowledge and Healing Practices at Métis Elders’ Gatherings,” in *A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* (2006), 85.

"Picking plants for food and medicine was and still is part of our lifestyle. We have . . . studied plants and their medicinal uses for generations. We have . . . preserved the knowledge of traditional plants as an intellectual right given to us by our ancestors. As technology advances, and industry moves further north, we are beginning to lose control of the very land on which our medicines grow."

—Rose Richardson, Métis community member from Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan quoted in Nathalie Kermaol, “Métis Women’s Environmental Knowledge and the Recognition of Métis Rights,” in *Living on the Land: Indigenous Women’s Understanding of Place*, eds. N. Kermaol and Isabel Altamirano-Jimenez (Edmonton: Athabasca Press, 2016).



Figure 67. NetPSPhotoFinder, “Bitterroot,” n.d., featured in *Bitterroot*, Mill Creek Nursery Ltd., August 12, 2019, <http://search.millcreeknursery.ca/11050005/Plant/2683/Bitterroot/>



Figure 68. Fireweed, a part of her larger painting, *Medicines to Help Us*. Christi Belcourt, *Medicines to Help Us*, 2003, acrylic on canvas, 51" x 91", Saskatoon, Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.christibelcourt.com/Gallery/gallery200Page4eDT.html>.



Métis Celebrations



Annual gatherings and celebrations during the year are a special time of homecoming, and the presence of the whole family is always greatly anticipated. Celebrations are not only a time for families and communities to gather; they also serve to affirm the community identity through traditions.⁸⁰ Some holidays are rooted in spiritual and religious traditions, and some are rooted in the celebration of the nation and of community.

Figure 69. Métis Nation of Alberta, “MNA Christmas Party,” December 2018. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Chivaree

A **chivaree** (say: shiv-ah-ree) is a Michif word for a party. It is a lively celebration or gathering with music, feasting, and dancing. New Year’s celebrations, for example, can be called a *chivaree*. *Chivarees* are also held following weddings. Wedding celebrations can go on for days after the official ceremony. Because of all the celebrations, many weddings would take place during the Christmas season. One Métis wedding tradition is that the guests all eat breakfast together before heading home. Another wedding **custom** is that guests have to sing a song to the bride to receive a piece of the wedding cake.

Feu de Joie

Feu de Joie is a term for a celebratory tradition of firing guns in salute at a ceremony.

Winter Celebrations

Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Le Réveillon | December 24–25

For some Métis, it is a tradition to gather as a family to attend a Catholic midnight Mass ceremony, which is a celebration of the birth of Jesus. For these families, it would be customary to fast during the day and evening of Christmas Eve. At the Mass, Catholic Métis would receive Communion. At the end of Mass, bells would ring to announce *Le Réveillon* (meaning “the awakening”). After the Mass, families would go home to enjoy an elaborate, multi-course feast. Following the meal, at around 2:00 a.m., families open their gifts. Often, the parish priest would travel to homes in the Métis community to visit with parishioners following the Mass.

Much driving about and visiting take place, and balls, family parties and celebrations of a kindred nature are set on foot. . . Processions of perhaps twenty-cutters and carriages set out for a long drive over the snow, and the occupants generally arrange to call at some friends' house in a body and have a dance. This is called a surprise party and the dissipation has its charms. . . One of the principal events in the holidays is the celebration of a midnight mass in the cathedral of St. Boniface, on Christmas Eve.

—Joseph James Hargrave, *Red River* (Montreal: Printed for the author by John Lovell, 1871), 171.



New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, Kissing Day, *Ochetookeskaw*, Shaking Hands Day | December 31–January 6

The calendar year begins anew a week after Le Réveillon. Again, there is reason to celebrate. The celebration of the new year begins on New Year's Eve, December 31, and the festivities last until January 6. When the clock strikes midnight at a New Year's Eve party, guests shake hands and kiss one another. It would not be uncommon to hear the *feu de joie*, the sound of guns being shot in the air as the clocks strike midnight. This tradition continues today in some rural areas here in Alberta.

Every household hosting a party serves food and baked goods to their guests. It is customary for someone, usually the men, to shoot once out a door facing west to see the old year out, and then shoot once out a door facing east to welcome the new year in.⁸¹ During this week, there are many parties and a lot of dancing. Here is one fond memory of a Métis New Year's celebration.

"If you stood outside, you could hear the sleigh bells ringing through the cold night air as families gathered at the homes of their elders (parents or grandparents). Traditionally, they would go from house to house to toast the New Year, and enjoy the feast. Upon arrival to someone's home you can hear the expression "La Bonne Année," and receive a kiss and a handshake from everyone in the house young and old. The custom of kissing and shaking hands is an expression of good wishes for the coming year... The feast included foods such as les **boulettes** (ground beef made into meatballs and rolled in flour and boiled), **bangs** (fried bread dough), flat galette (a flattened bread), potatoes, pork, confit—berries in sauce, beef, turkey, homemade pies, **tourtière** (a pie with ground meat and spices for filling), and **pouchin** (boiled cake)."

—M. Bercier, P. Laverdure, and R. Davis, "Memories of Christmas and New Year's on the Turtle Mountain Reservation," the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa (North Dakota: North Dakota State Department of Public Instruction, 1997), interview with Irene Fox-Davis, 1994. Bolding added.



Commemorative and Cultural Celebrations

Métis Week and Louis Riel Day | November 11–16

People throughout Alberta gather throughout **Métis Week** to celebrate the Métis in Alberta. Events such as formal ceremonies, special exhibitions, and exciting celebrations take place all week across the province.



Figure 70. These men were honoured as proud Métis veterans during the Flag Raising Ceremony at Edmonton's City Hall.
Métis Nation of Alberta, "City Hall – Métis Week," personal communication, November 2019.



Métis Week centres on Louis Riel Day, a nationally recognized day of commemoration to honour and reflect on Louis Riel's memory and influence in the Métis Nation. Riel is remembered through ceremonies, commemorative walks, gatherings, dances, feasts, and music. Louis Riel Day is held on November 16 because, on that day in 1885, Riel lost his life for leading the Nation in a movement that asserted Métis **sovereignty** and the Métis right to **self-determination** in their Homeland.

Figure 71. Courtesy of Kimberley Fraser-Airhart, "Louis Riel's gravestone," November 2017, personal collection.

Figure 72. During Métis Week, the Métis Nation of Alberta hosts a Louis Riel Commemoration Walk that reflects the same commemorative walk done by Métis across the nation. This walk is done in honour of Riel's family and friends who carried his casket 6 miles in the harsh Manitoba winter to St. Boniface so that he may finally be laid to rest. Check in with the Métis Nation of Alberta each year for details on this annual walk.

Photo: Métis Nation of Alberta, "Louis Riel Walk," November 10, 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.





Figure 73. Métis Nation of Alberta, “2017 Canoe Brigade Metis Crossing,” July 4, 2017. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Voyageur Days | Annually in the Summer

Métis Crossing, a Métis cultural centre just south of Smoky Lake, Alberta, hosts an annual event that invites everyone to experience Métis culture and traditions first-hand. Throughout the weekend, participants learn about and participate in Métis traditions such as jigging, fiddling, trapping, **hide tanning**, dry meat making, beading, and **finger weaving**. There are also contests, performances, workshops, and other events. Métis culture and traditions of all kinds are celebrated throughout the weekend.

Back to Batoche Days | Annually in Mid-July

Back to Batoche Days is a four-day festival in Batoche, Saskatchewan, that showcases Métis culture and traditions. Métis host their kin from other provinces, along with guests of all ages and backgrounds, who enjoy jigging, storytelling, food, fiddling, competitive games, and singing.

Figure 74. Greg Huszar Photography, “Dancers and Fiddlers at Back to Batoche,”
<https://backtobatochedays.ca/>



"Family and friends enjoy the opportunity to reconnect and honour the rich contributions of Métis people and culture to the colorful mosaic of our Canadian society."

—Warren Kaeding, “Greetings from Minister Kaeding,” Back to Batoche Days, Métis Nation—Saskatchewan,
<https://backtobatochedays.ca/>.

Alberta Métis Fest | Annually, Date Varies



The Métis Nation of Alberta hosts a party in each of their regions to showcase Métis culture, talent, and history. Each region features a combination of jigging contests, fiddling, food, storytelling, and community gathering.

Figure 75. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Alberta Métis Fest Provincial,” March 26, 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



Métis Youth & Seniors Symposium | Annually, Date Varies

Each winter, the Métis Nation of Alberta hosts a gathering of Métis seniors and youth. At this intergenerational gathering, members of the older and younger generations of Métis come together to share culture, traditions, and learning.

Figure 76. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Youth & Seniors Symposium," 2018. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



Métis Nation of Alberta Annual General Assembly | Annually in Mid-August

Since 1928, the Métis Nation of Alberta has gathered annually to build the Nation and commemorate another year of success and growth. Each year, one of the six regions of the Métis Nation of Alberta hosts the **Annual General Assembly (AGA)**. Beginning in 2021, Métis Crossing will host the AGA every second year.

During this event, leaders of the Métis Nation of Alberta and their affiliates report to the community on the achievements of that year, as well as updates on progress toward the Nation's goals. Previous business minutes and financial statements are reviewed. Citizens and Métis Nation of Alberta leaders propose and vote on resolutions.



Figure 77. Métis Nation of Alberta, "Eligible members of the MNA vote on resolutions during the 2019 AGA," 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

During the AGA, the host region puts on a special local event. There is also a youth conference, concurrent with the AGA, where Métis youth gather and participate in business and social affairs. The AGA also includes a tradeshow where Métis artisans and business owners showcase goods and services. At the AGA, there are also lively social gatherings of families and performers, who celebrate cultural traditions together by showcasing and teaching Métis dance, music, and other traditions.

In 2019, a historic goal was celebrated at the 91st
MNA AGA:

"Métis self-government was finally recognized by the Government of Canada. On Thursday, June 27, 2019, Canada and the MNA signed a historic agreement. The agreement recognizes the Métis Nation within Alberta as having an inherent, constitutionally protected right to self-government."

—Métis Nation of Alberta, *91st Annual General Assembly Annual Report 2018-2019* (Edmonton: Métis Nation of Alberta, 2019), 14.



Figure 78. Métis Nation of Alberta, Prince Charles Students performing at the AGA, 2016, <http://albertametis.com/photos/2016-2/annual-general-assembly-2016/nggallery/page/4>.



National Indigenous Peoples Day | June 21

National Indigenous Peoples Day is a national celebration for all Indigenous people in Canada, including all of the First Nations, the Métis, and the Inuit. June 21 was chosen because it is the summer solstice, making it the longest day of the year. Québec first celebrated this day in 1990. In 1995, the Royal Commission on **Aboriginal** Peoples recommended it be recognized as a national holiday. National Indigenous Peoples Day is an official part of Canada's calendar and is celebrated by the Métis across the country.⁸²

"On June 13, 1996, former Governor General Roméo LeBlanc officially declared June 21 National Aboriginal Day." It was renamed National Indigenous Peoples Day in 2017.

—Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *National Aboriginal Day History*, archived from the original PDF on 17 November 2017.



Figures 79 & 80. Courtesy of Billie-Jo Grant, "National Indigenous Peoples Day, Edmonton Expo Centre," June 21, 2019, personal collection.



Métis Harvesting and Culinary Traditions

Harvesting and culinary traditions are essential aspects of Métis culture and are deeply rooted in Métis history and in the Métis **ethnogenesis**. These thriving traditions are dynamic and continue to evolve.

Harvesting

The term *harvesting* refers to all aspects of collecting resources from the land. Métis harvesting includes trapping, hunting, fishing, medicine picking, berry picking, and gathering. Harvesting has been a part of Métis ways of being for centuries. Though harvesting is not the single source of sustenance for Métis in Alberta today, harvesting traditions remain an essential expression of Métis culture.

Métis harvesting is about food, spirituality, tradition, respect, and culture. It is more than simply hunting or fishing. . . Harvesting is an important part of the Métis way of life and a mechanism for cultural transmission.

—Métis Nation of Alberta, “What We Heard,” July 2018, 9.



Figure 81. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Watching Winter Trapping Basics,” 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Hunting, which is one harvesting practice, involves the shooting of game, including rabbits, grouse, moose, bison, elk, and deer. Trapping, another type of harvesting, involves setting traps for fur-bearing animals. Trapping is done primarily to harvest animal furs; however, some people also eat the meat of the trapped animals.

Policies developed with Métis consultation empower Métis’ ability to practice harvesting and teach their children in traditional ways.⁸³

Traditional harvesting reflects values associated with need and availability, not demand-based or recreational values. When Métis are taught the traditions of Métis harvesting, they learn to be true stewards of the environment.

Traplines are a vital part of the Métis way of life. Many Métis trappers have lost traplines, or lost portions to development. Métis trapping traditions have been completely lost in some cases, and the only way to ensure the practice continues is to make trapline ownership available to Métis trappers.

—Métis Nation of Alberta, “What We Heard,” July 2018, 12. Bolding added.



Figure 82. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Winter Trapping – Furs and Traps,” 2019. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



Métis harvesters harvest what is available, and the purpose of the harvest informs what is harvested. For example, harvesting for sustenance, family, community, one meal, ceremony, or for cultural purposes have different needs.

—Métis Nation of Alberta, “What We Heard,” July 2018, 7.



Figure 83. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Canoe Brigade Metis Crossing,” 2017. Courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Reflecting on the way Métis are restricted in their access to their rights as Indigenous people is an opportunity for educators to realize how a lack of understanding among government officials can foster policies that do not reflect the realities of the Métis.

Métis harvesting is, by its very nature, conservation focused.

—Métis Nation of Alberta, “What We Heard,” July 2018, 11.

Traditional Cuisine

Many Canadians believe that traditional Métis 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 feature an especially diverse spread of delicious food. Gathering to share food brings the community together. Whether it is fresh preparation, canning, or drying meats and fish, food preparation is a special part of Métis family life and a time of bonding.

Métis believe that sharing what you have is an important value, and this value is expressed in the culinary culture of Métis people. 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; when a family has extra meat, it is traditional, even today, to share the extra meat with their family and the wider community—especially with those in need.

The main place of family activity was the kitchen. A hot bowl of Metis soup (*rubaboo*) and a hot piece of bannock (*li galette*) was always at the ready, along with a good cup of hot tea.

—Audreen Hourie, Anne Carrière-Acco, Lawrence Barkwell, and Leah Dorion, “Metis Foods and Food Preparation,” in *Metis Legacy Volume II: Michif Culture, Heritage, and Folkways*, eds. Lawrence Barkwell, Leah M. Dorion, and Audreen Hourie (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute and Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 2006), 120. Bolding added.



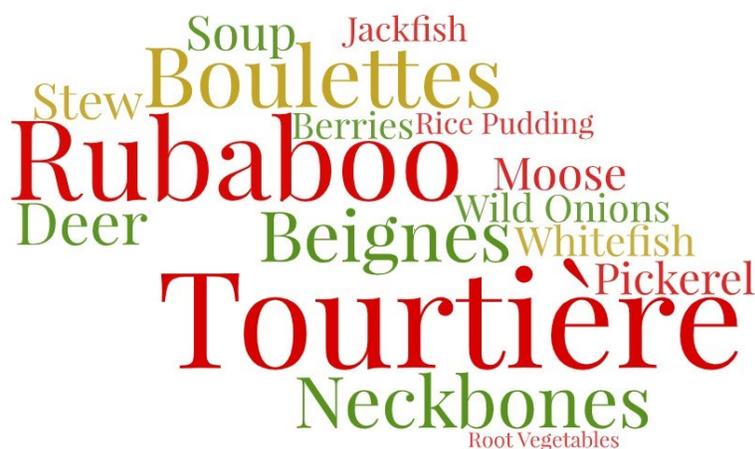
Some Métis have a tradition of putting out an extra table setting at feasts. After the meal, the set-aside food is put into the fire for “those who went before us.” These practices are part of the Métis value of generosity, and also of honouring their ancestors. These key aspects of Métis tradition are maintained through culinary culture.

In another Métis custom relating to food, when a Métis child shoots or snares their first animal, the child will have a feast prepared for them, in which the family and community gather to celebrate the success of the harvest.

Food is not just for sustenance; Métis communities also view food as medicine. Métis soup recipes are known to have healing properties; they prevent many illnesses by including a variety of nutritious foods in a single pot.



Figure 84. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Youth holding up their catch from nets,” personal communication, 2019.



There are many different Métis recipes, and they vary across communities, families, and regions of residence. One common feature of Métis recipes is that they do not include a set, perfectly measured ingredient list. Like traditional stories, languages, and music, Métis recipes are taught and learned through oral tradition. Learning orally means that the learner witnesses the preparation and develops the skill of approximating the balance of ingredients. The best way to learn about Métis food is to join a Métis gathering, enjoy the food, and listen to Métis people tell stories about the foods their families' treasures!



Conclusion

Community, networking, kinship, traditional storytelling, mobility, adaptability, and resilience are all foundational values of Métis culture that provide structure to Métis communities. These components are essential to understanding the Métis worldview and guide Métis ways of living. These values have guided the Métis in periods full of exciting opportunities and also during times when the Métis have faced devastating, challenging circumstances.

Learning about Métis culture reveals some of the beautiful, vibrant expressions of Métis people. There are many aspects to Métis culture and traditions—including clothing, art, architecture, transportation, music, dance, food, sport, storytelling, faith, and celebrations. This foundational knowledge resource serves as an introduction to the diversity of Métis ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Métis values, traditions, and culture are strengthened by lived experience. Many Métis today stand true to the traditional ways of life explored in this document and practice them daily. Others, who are in the process of reconnecting with their families and communities, may not have had the benefit of a traditional lived experience. There are many reasons for this displacement, such as **Residential and Indian Day Schools**, the **Sixties Scoop**, the hiding of one's identity, intergenerational trauma, and forced assimilation.

Educators need to consider the variety of contexts in which Métis people live today as they prepare to introduce students to learn about Métis culture and traditions. Métis students will have varying experiences in their exposure to Métis culture and traditions. Some Métis students know and live their culture and traditions vibrantly, while others may not even know they are Métis. It is in this diversity that Métis resilience is evident and celebrated, and creates a welcoming space for those who are reconnecting.

As educators develop and incorporate their own foundational knowledge of Métis culture and traditions, students of every background will develop a wholesome, positive, informed understanding of Métis identity, culture, traditions, and belonging. This shift in narrative fosters a positive outlook towards reconciliation.



Notes

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