



Métis Nation Governance

Foundational
Knowledge
Resource



**Rupertsland
Institute**
Métis Centre of Excellence

A publication of Rupertsland Institute



Métis Nation Governance

Métis Foundational Knowledge Theme



A publication of
Rupert's Island Institute



Languages of Métis

Métis Culture & Traditions

Homeland History

Métis in Alberta

Métis Nation Governance

Introduction to Métis Nation Governance



The Métis Nation has been a unified collective of communities for over two centuries. Throughout this time, it has established governance that supported the needs of the community based on two core ways of being: *otipemisiwak* (say: oh-tih-pem-soo-wuk) and *wahkohtowin* (say: wak-koh-toh-win). *Otipemisiwak* is a term from the Cree language referring to the self-led, independence of the Métis within their Nation. *Wahkohtowin* is also a Cree language term, referring to the foundational way Métis live relationally. Throughout its history and today, the Métis Nation governs its own Nation with passion for its people.



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*



Rupert's Island Institute (RII) 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 RII mandates in education, training, and research.

Rupert's Island Centre for Teaching and Learning (RCTL) was established in 2018 under RII'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 RII's team of Métis educators. RII 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 Rupert's Island Institute are honoured that members of the Métis Nation in Alberta have determined RII 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 Rupert's Island Institute's K-12 Education Team have been primary contributors to the development of the Foundational Knowledge Themes.



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 Rupert's Island Institute. Lisa is 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."



Visit our website for more information, classroom resources, and more:
<http://www.rupert'sland.org/teaching-learning/>

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Kimberley Fraser-Airhart

Kimberley is a Métis woman from amiskwaciy-wâskahikan (Edmonton, AB). In Spring 2018, she began working with RII 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 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 Rupert's Island 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 **Rupert's Island 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 Vermilion 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 Lizée
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.

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Billyjo DeLaRonde; Jason Mckay (Métis Nation-Saskatchewan); Marilyn née Wells, Underschultz/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, Underschultz/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 who 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.

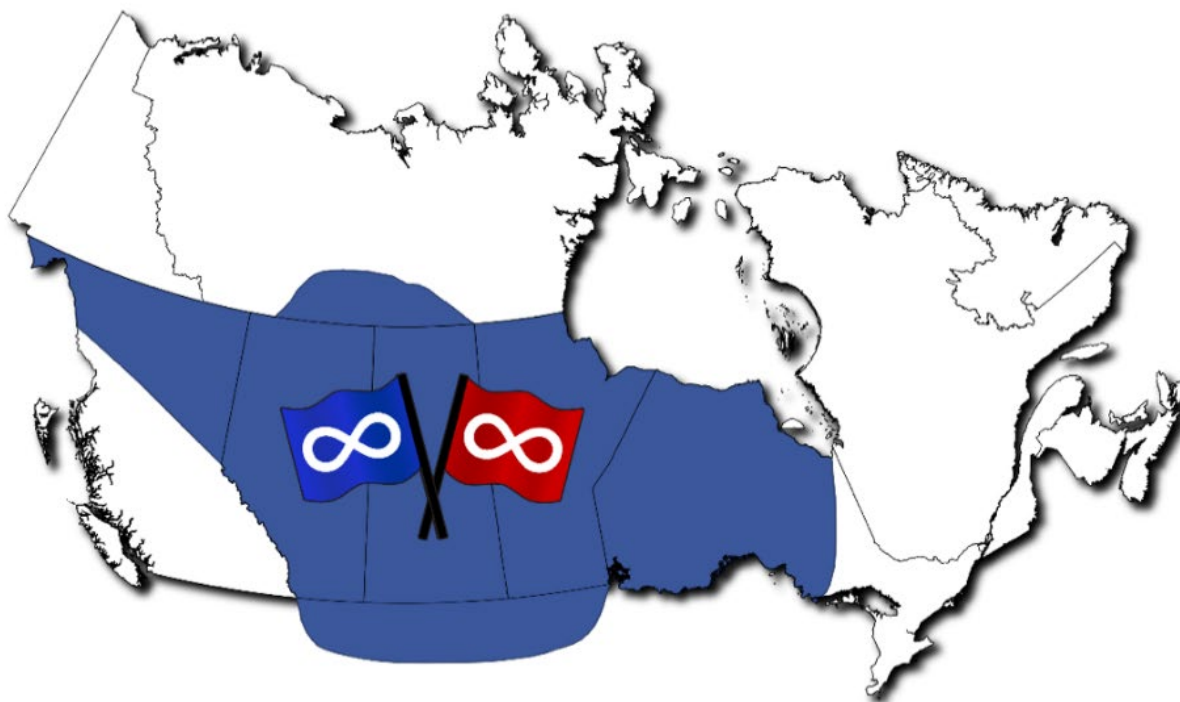
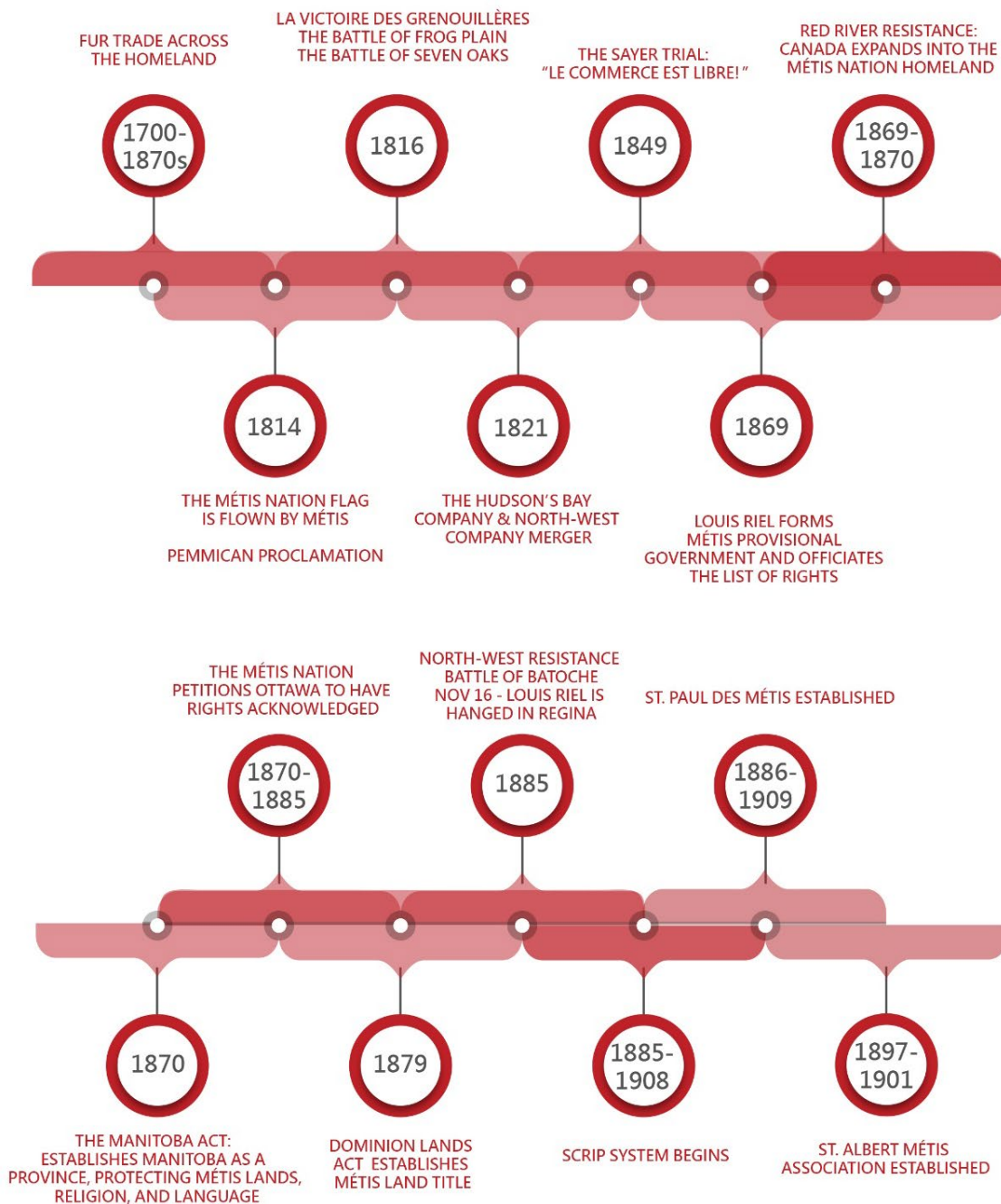


Figure 1 Métis Nation Homeland in Canada. Photo courtesy of the Métis Nation of Alberta, 2021.



A Timeline of Métis History

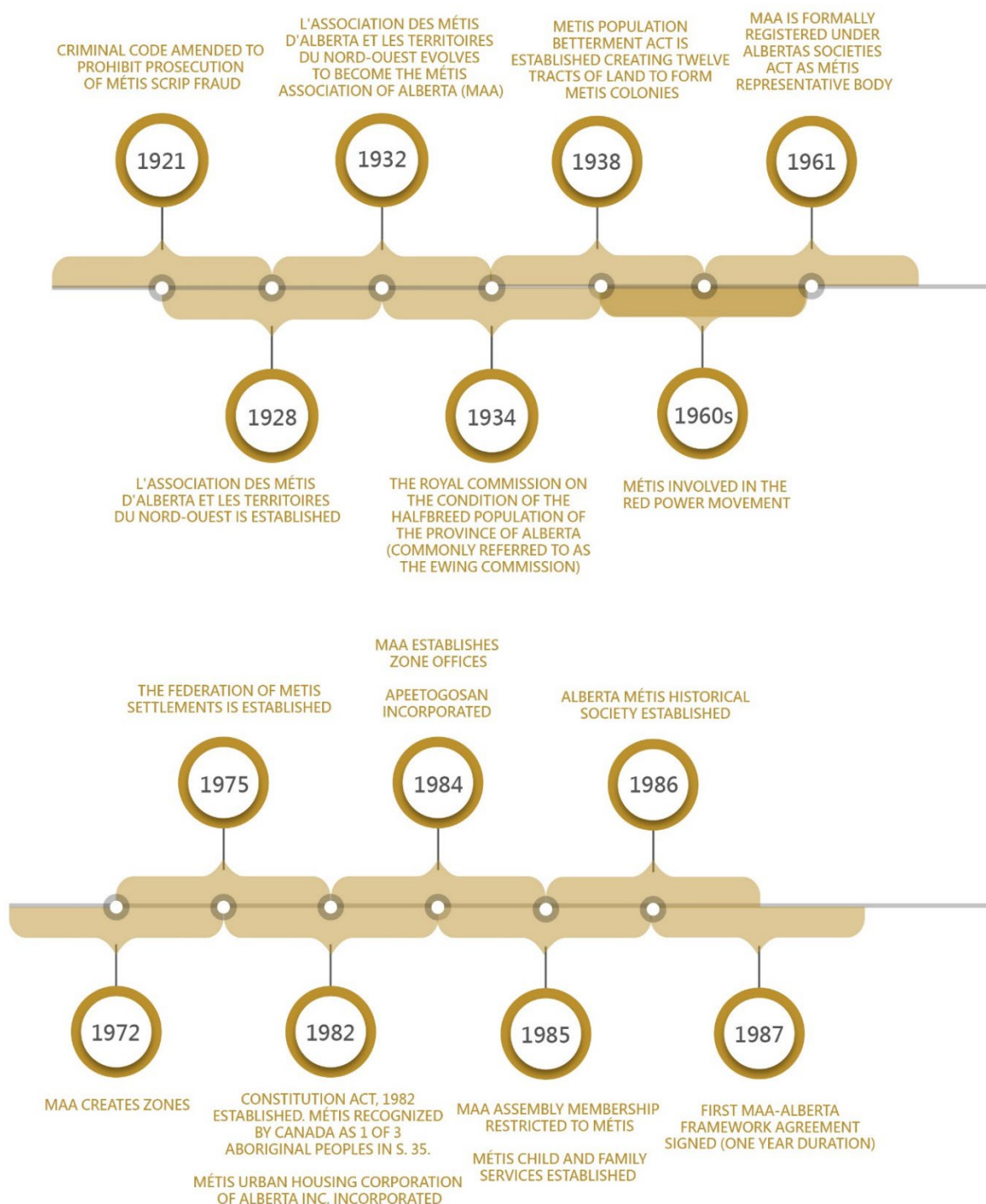
1800s





A Timeline of Métis History

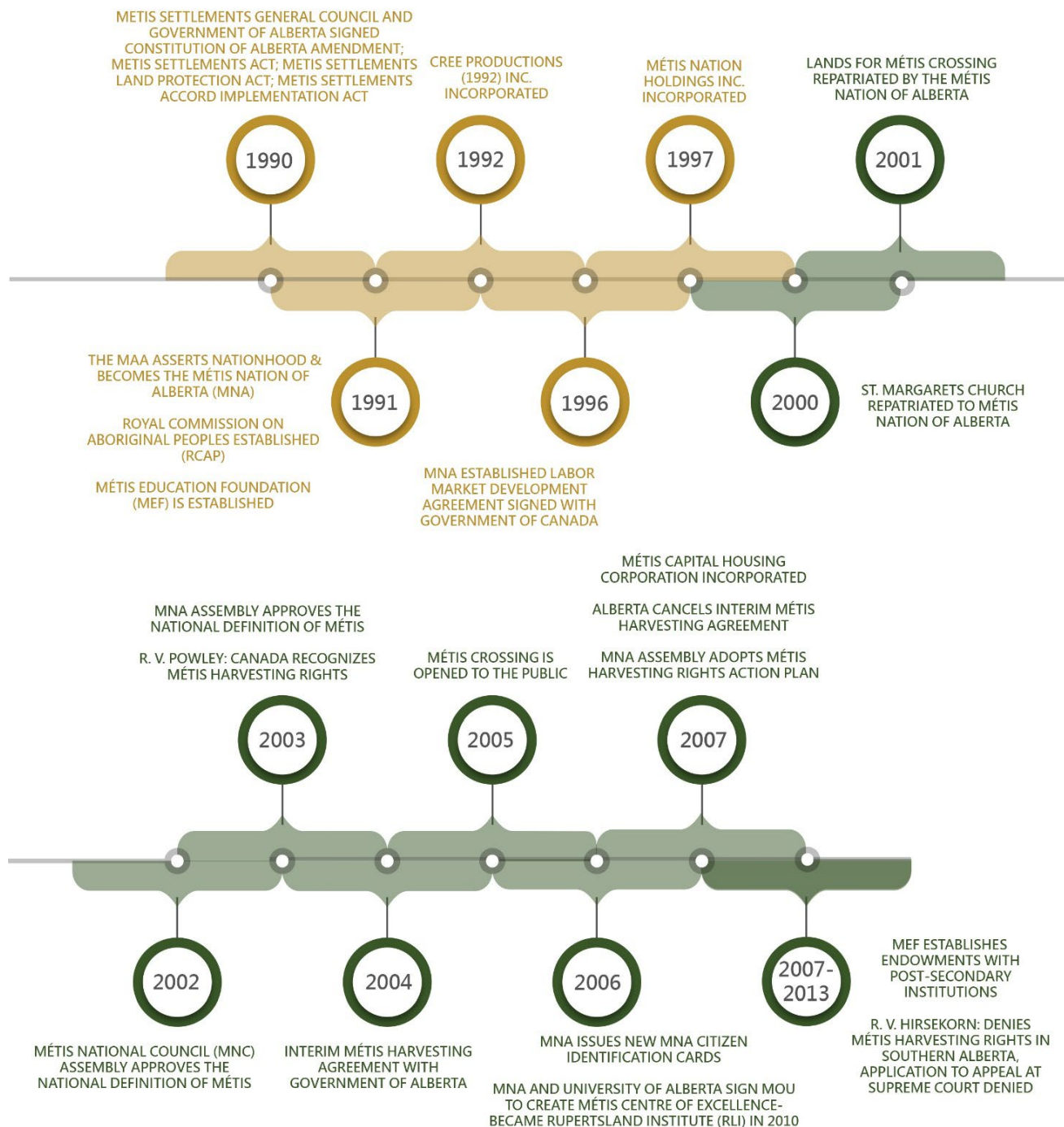
1900s





A Timeline of Métis History

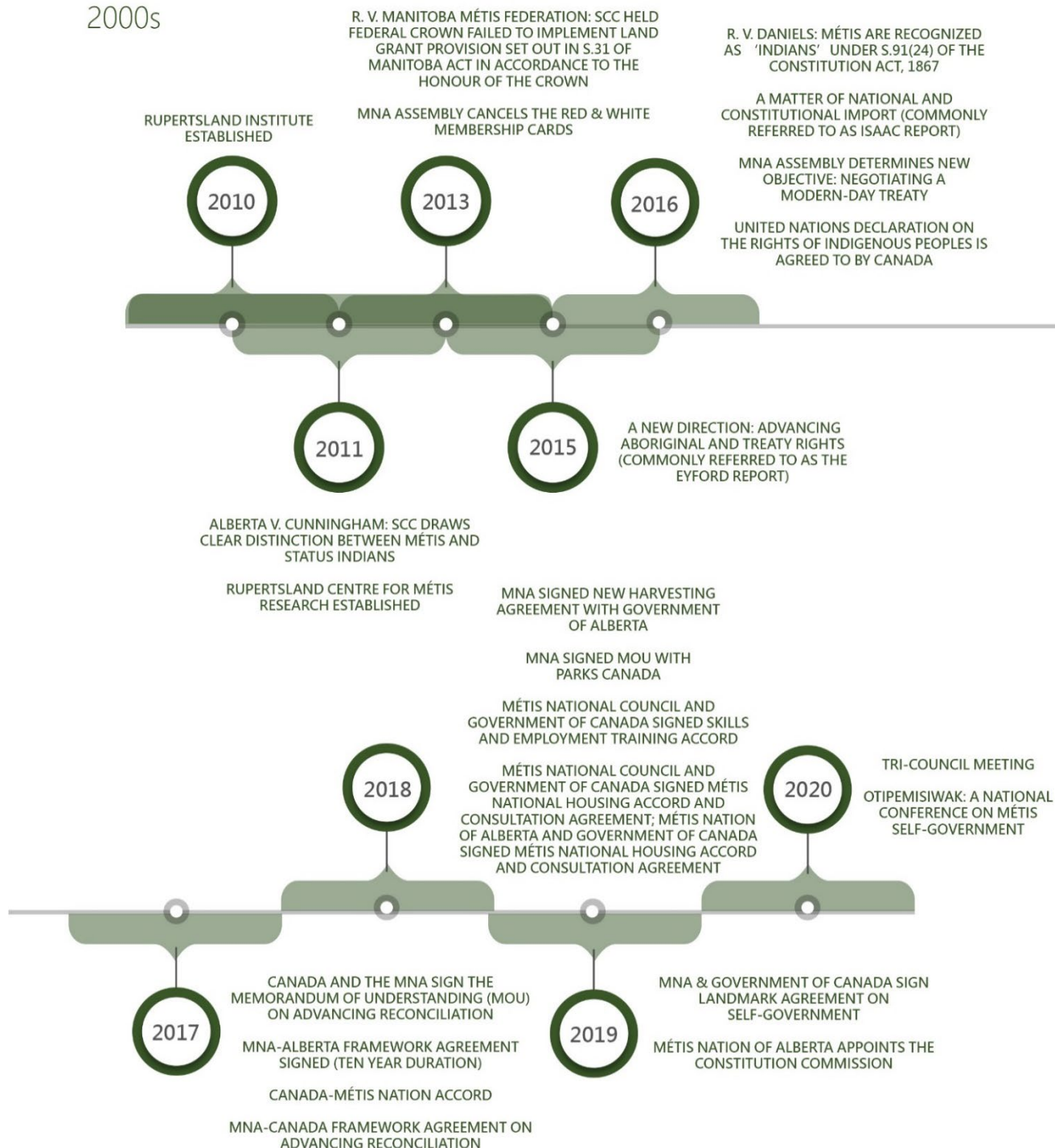
1990s-2000s





A Timeline of Métis History

2000s





Métis Nation Governance Vocabulary List

Term

Definition

Aboriginal

Descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The first peoples in Canada, according to Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution, 1982. 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 policy.

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 receive direction on the Nation's future goals. It is also a time of celebration and participating in many cultural activities and events. Also called the Annual Assembly or Annual General Meeting.

Autonomy

A right or condition free from external control or influence; independence.

Bannock

Made from flour, salt, baking powder, oil, water. Bannock can be baked, fried, or cooked 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 *la Victoire de la Grenouillère*.

Bois-Brulés

A French term that translates to "burnt wood." Another name for the early Métis.

Chief Captain of the Hunt

A selected leader in the Métis buffalo hunt governance system. This was the highest position in buffalo hunt governance.

Colonialism

The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial control over another country and/or Nation. This typically includes dominating the Indigenous peoples living there.

Community

A unified group of individuals; a group of people who share a living place or a common characteristic or identity.



Constitution Act	<p>The 1982 Constitution Act is a landmark document in Canadian history. It achieved full independence for Canada by allowing the country to change its Constitution without approval from Britain. For the Métis Nation, a critical part of the Constitution Act is Section 35 1 and 2, which states:</p> <p>"35. (1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.</p> <p>(2) In this Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada."</p>
Convention of Forty	<p>A group with twenty French-speaking and twenty English-speaking Red River residents. They formed a provisional government who represented the rights and values of all residents in Red River.</p>
Convention of Twenty-Four	<p>A group with twelve French-speaking and twelve English-speaking Red River residents. They formed a provisional government that represented the rights and values of all residents in Red River.</p>
Culture	<p>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 endeavours as a Nation of people.</p>
Cuthbert Grant	<p>The first leader of the Métis of the early 19th century. Under his leadership, Métis asserted their nationhood and economic freedom when Canada attempted to control the trade of pemmican in 1814.</p>
Diplomacy	<p>Dealing with people in a sensitive and tactful, or "politically correct," way.</p>
Displacement	<p>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</p>
Dizaines	<p>(say: dee-zayns)</p> <p>A selection of ten men who became the captains for the Buffalo Hunt.</p>
Ethnogenesis	<p>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.</p>
Euro-Canadian	<p>Describing people and groups who have ancestry and national affiliation primarily with European Nations. This is especially in reference to the settlers from European nations who have worked to colonize the land for the last two centuries.</p>



Ewing Commission

The Royal Commission on the Condition of the Halfbreed Population of the Province of Alberta in 1934. Commonly known as the Ewing Commission, named after the primary commissioner, Justice Alfred Freeman Ewing, this inquiry led to the formation of the Metis Settlements.

Exovedate

(say: ex-o-ve-dăť)

A Latin term coined by Louis Riel for the Provisional Government, with the title of his leadership in the council being Exovede, meaning "out of the flock."

Exovede

(say: exo-veed)

A Latin term that Riel coined as a reference for his title as the *ex officio* leader of the Exovedate, the executive council of the Provisional Government of Saskatchewan.

Fiduciary

A legal obligation of the highest degree for one party to act in the best interests of another. Typically, a fiduciary responsibility refers to financial compensation.

First Nations

Defined by the Alberta Teachers' Association as "status and non-status Indian peoples in Canada." ⁴

FNMI

An acronym often used to refer to the inclusion of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives. This misleading reference erases the distinctions of each Aboriginal group. It is more respectful to avoid the acronym, and honour people as a part of each distinct group in a given situation.

Framework Agreement

An agreement between two parties that recognizes that the parties have come to an agreement on some issues, but not all issues. The agreement is a commitment to move forward in addressing issues.

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.

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.

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.



Historical North-West	The historic North-West is the name of the land that Métis knew as their Homeland. It refers to land north and west of Montreal, including much of what is recognized as the Métis Homeland today.
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.
Indian	<p>The term “Indian” stems from the wrongful belief that Christopher Columbus had reached Asia in 1492. The term persisted throughout North American history as a description of Indigenous peoples in the “New World.” Although the term is now considered outdated, its use in the Canadian legal system dates back to the 1876 <i>Constitution</i> and <i>Indian Act</i>.</p> <p>Today, it remains the legal term used by the Government of Canada to refer to First Nations peoples. Status 'Indians' are registered through the <i>Indian Act</i>, which continues to protect their rights and freedoms as the original inhabitants of the land. This is further enshrined in Section 35 of the 1982 <i>Constitution Act</i> (s.35(2)).</p>
Indigeneity	A term expressing the fact of originating from a particular identity, history, culture, or region.
Indigenous	<p>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, and spiritual beliefs.</p>
kaa- tipaimshoyaahk	<p>(say: kah-tip-aim-show-yahk)</p> <p>A Michif expression of a way of being. The closest translation to English is 'we own, govern, or lead, ourselves.'</p>
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.
Laager	<p>(say: lah-ger)</p> <p>A barricade formation, created by arranging Red River Carts in a circle around their most vulnerable community members and possessions.</p>



L' Association
des Métis
d'Alberta et les
Territoires du
Nord-Ouest

A precursor to the Métis Nation of Alberta, this was one of the first Métis governance systems established in Alberta. Métis initially began gathering under this formal name in 1928 to petition the Government of Alberta who were moving to dismiss Métis title to lands and resources that were not surrendered through scrip.

Land Surveyors

Surveying or land surveying refers to the act of determining the position of points and the distances and angles between them on the land. Land Surveyors during this time would be sent into areas to prepare for Euro-Canadian settlement.

List of Rights

A document that outlined what Métis considered necessary for communities in the Red River area to enter into Canadian Confederation. Four successive lists of rights were drafted by the provisional government. The final version became the basis of federal legislation creating the province of Manitoba.

Litigation

The process of taking legal action.

Louis Riel

One of the Homeland Heroes of the Métis Nation, Riel was a prominent leader of the Métis through the late 19th 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 an elected Canadian politician.

Manitoba Act

The official act that brought the province of Manitoba into Confederation on May 12, 1870.

Métis

Métis is enshrined in Section 35 of the 1982 *Constitution Act* (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

Metis Population
Betterment Act,
1938

This legislation allowed for 12 tracts of land, to be identified through a series of Government Orders-In-Council.

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.



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.
Mobility	The movement of Métis across the Homeland is at the heart of the Métis experience.
Nation-to-Nation	A relationship in which both parties act and communicate with respect for the authority, sovereignty, and dignity of each other's governance.
Nationhood	National identity or independence.
Non-Status Indian	As defined by the Government of Canada, this term "commonly refers to people who identify themselves as Indians but who are not entitled to registration on the Indian Register pursuant to the Indian Act. Some may however be members of a First Nation band." ⁶
North-West Half-Breed Commission	A group established by the Government of Canada to address claims of Aboriginal title to land that Métis had in the historic North-West, leading to the deliverance of scrip for individual Métis families. This was distributed so Métis could exchange it for valuable lands for either cash payment or other trade.
North-West Mounted Police	A Canadian police force established in 1873 to establish and maintain order and authority in the North-West Territories.
Ombudsman	An appointed official who can investigate individuals' complaints against maladministration, especially that of public authorities.
Orangemen	A "headstrong" political and religious society with a home base in Ireland. ⁷ The Orange Order in Canada was passionately anti-Catholicism, anti-Métis, and pro-expansionism.
Otipemisiwak	(say: oh-tee-pem-ih-si-wahk) 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. <i>Otipemisiwak</i> is not fully understood in one English term or expression.



Pemmican	Traditionally made of dried meat, usually buffalo and 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 behaviours.
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.
Powley Test	As a result of the R. v. Powley case in 2003, a ten-factor test determining a person's legal claim to Métis rights was established.
Provisional Government	A provisional government is formed when an urgent need for political decision-making is required and dissolved when this issue has been resolved. There were two levels of governance within this structure: the executive leadership, which was comprised of a president, a secretary/marshal, and the council of twelve.
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." ⁸
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 Expeditionary Force	A Canadian military force sent to Manitoba after the province joined Confederation. They effectively drove Métis off their lands with threats and violence.
Repatriation	The process of returning an asset or an item of symbolic value to its rightful owner or place of origin.
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.

Revolutionary Bill of Rights

Similar to the 1869-70 "List of Rights," the Revolutionary Bill of Rights was a document intended to get the Government of Canada to recognize the rights of Métis to their possessions and lands. The document was published on March 8, 1885.

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 among a racist settler society that socially marginalized them, creating a variety of challenges for Métis families, such as barriers to health care and employment.

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.

Sabbath Day

A day of religious observance and abstinence from work. In Christian traditions, this day is taken on Sunday.

Scrip

A document that was used as evidence of entitlement to something. Scrip was distributed by the Canadian government to Métis people so they could use it to exchange valuable lands for either cash payment or other trade.

Self-determination

The right of a people to decide their own destiny, their own education, political status, economic habits, and cultural and social traditions.

Self-governance

To exercise continuous sovereign authority over oneself or community; to direct the making and administration of policy over a group of one's own people, as opposed to having external administration and policies exerting control.

Self-government

A system that organizes people and ways of living that is controlled and directed by the inhabitants of a political unit rather than by an outside authority (the control of one's own affairs).⁹

Settler

A person who moves to a new place with the intention to stay there.



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.¹⁰ 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.

Status Indian

The Alberta Teachers' Association has defined a Status Indian as any "First Nations person who meets the requirements and is registered with the Canadian government under the Indian Act."¹¹ See also Indian.

Squatting / Squatters

After being unfairly displaced, Métis families would make their homes on unoccupied land claimed by the Euro-Canadian government as Crown land. These families built communities in these areas, being labelled as "squatters." Métis who lived on these unoccupied lands were recognized by Euro-Canadians as squatting because they occupied lands without recognized legal entitlement, and without meeting the land and building requirements set by Euro-Canadian government.

Sovereignty

The authority of a nation to govern itself.

Traditions

Long-standing customs that are an expression of values and identity.

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.

Treason

The crime of using force or violence for the purpose of overthrowing the government. In some instances, this includes disclosing, without lawful authority, information that may be used to impair the safety of the people.¹²

Values

The principles of standards of behaviour or ways of living.

Wahkohtowin

(say: wah-koh-toh-win)

A concept in the Cree language describing the importance of kinship among family, extended family, and relationships built extending to natural and spiritual worlds, human and non-human, living and not living worlds.



Introduction

The **Métis** Nation across the **Homeland** has been developing resilient **governance** systems for over 200 years. The building of a strong Nation requires dedicated, effective leadership. The Métis relay stories of **nationhood** through oral and written histories, at family gatherings, **community** events, and within education systems.

The history of Métis governance is an important story to hear from a Métis **perspective**. The way Métis share their story of nationhood is rooted in key Métis **values** that unify them as a strong, independent Nation connected through complex ties of **kinship**. Métis governance emerged through centuries of resistance to colonization by the Canadian **government** and generations of **displacement** by European **settlers**. The Métis story of governance celebrates the Métis assertion of independence, as evidenced in contemporary moves towards reclaiming sovereign nationhood through **self-government**. Métis within Alberta today are establishing a written constitution while moving towards a strong Métis government.

Governance (*verb*)

to exercise continuous sovereign authority over; to direct the making and administration of policy over a group of people

Government (*noun*)

The system that manages and organizes a community or territory

What story is shared about Métis governance? Who is telling that story in Alberta schools?

Educators across Canada have a responsibility to understand the history they are sharing. As they invite students to engage with these histories, educators are responsible for critically reflecting on whose perspective of history they are telling and what different perspectives they must consider. Engaging with this theme will enable educators to consider the Métis Nation's foundational history and its contemporary governance systems.



Figure 2. Métis Nation of Alberta President Audrey Poitras holds the signed Framework Agreement for Advancing Reconciliation with Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett on November 16, 2017. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

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Métis Foundational Ways of Being

The Métis Nation leads and cares for its communities through distinct governance practices, as it has for generations. **Traditions**, values, and cultural practices inform the way Métis continue to steer themselves in both provisional and contemporary structures through the Nation's history. Understanding key words of the languages and **culture** of Métis will equip educators to better reflect on the key structures of Métis governance.

Before hearing the stories of Métis governance, two foundational concepts will be shared: **otipemisiwak** (say: oh-tih-pem-soo-wuk) and **wahkohtowin** (say: wah-koh-toh-win). Dr. Adam Gaudry highlighted these two ways of being in the foundations of Métis governance.¹³ These central concepts involving independence and interrelatedness will be highlighted throughout the Métis story that follows. By re-centring Métis history within this Métis worldview, a better understanding of the complexities of Métis governance can be developed and shared with students.

The people who own themselves
Otipemisiwak

We, the Métis Nation, are Otipemisiwak
— the people who own themselves.

—“Self-Government,” Métis Nation of Alberta,
<http://albertametis.com/governance/self-government/>.

Otipemisiwak is a word in the Cree language denoting the idea that the Métis lead, govern, care for, and own themselves. It was the word the Cree used to describe the Métis. This word recognizes the centrality of independence and self-sufficiency in the Métis community's governance, culture, and language. This term also reflects the way in which the Métis have historically valued an independent political existence above all else, going so far as to design political institutions that limit individuals' power in the community.¹⁴

Expressing *otipemisiwak* in English is complex, as it is not fully captured by one term. It is best to understand *otipemisiwak* as a Métis way of being and as an acknowledgement that Métis are determining their own destiny as a self-governing Nation. This way of being is also captured in the **Michif** term, **kaa-tipaimshoyaahk** (say: kah-tip-aim-show-yahk), meaning “we own, govern, and lead ourselves.” Michif and Cree are both important traditional languages in Métis communities in Alberta. **Louis Riel** gives insight into the expression of *otipemisiwak* in his writing *Last Memoir*:¹⁵

"When the Government of Canada presented itself at our doors it found us at peace. It found that the Métis people of the North-West could not only live well without it . . . but that it had a government of its own, free, peaceful, well functioning, contributing to the work of civilization in a way that the Company from England could never have done without thousands of soldiers. It was a government with an organized constitution, whose jurisdiction was more legitimate and worthy of respect, because it was exercised over a country that belonged to it."

—Louis Riel, quoted in *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel*, ed. George Stanley, 5 vols. (Edmonton AB: University of Alberta Press, 1985). “Company from England” is in reference to the Hudson's Bay Company.



In the late 1800s, when conflict arose between the national agendas of the Métis Nation and of the newly formed Government of Canada, *otipemisiwak* was the strengthening philosophy the Métis used to actualize their political goals despite opposition from Canada.

Despite the stories often told in Canada today, the leaders of the Dominion of Canada (pre-1867) were never given consent to expand into Métis territories and to control Métis communities. The real and legitimate self-determining authority over the Métis Nation has always been by the Métis, for the Métis. As a result, the independent and legitimate authority to govern the Métis community continues to rest with Métis people today. This theme will explore both historical expressions of *otipemisiwak* and contemporary institutions expressing *otipemisiwak* and their vision for Métis governance today.

"When Canada sought to impose authority over the Métis people through a trend of ignoring legal petitions, Louis Riel declared that, there existed a "Métis government, of which the Canadian Government cannot become trustee unless by consent of the people."

— Louis Riel, quoted in *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel*, ed. George Stanley, 5 vols. (Edmonton AB: University of Alberta Press, 1985).

The key words below support the story of Métis governance contained within the concept of *otipemisiwak*.

Nation-to-Nation

This term is used to describe a relationship in which both parties act and communicate with respect for the authority, **sovereignty**, and dignity of each other's governance.¹⁶

"There were two societies who treated [existed] together. One was small, but in its smallness had its rights. The other was great, but in its greatness had no greater rights than the rights of the small."

—Louis Riel, as quoted by the National Post, "David Chartrand: After 143 years, a dream come true for the Métis people," March 25, 2013, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/david-chartrand-after-143-years-a-dream-come-true-for-the-metis-people>



Figure 3. Dan Cardinal, MNA Vice-President, Aaron Barner, MNA Senior Executive Officer, Audrey Poitras, MNA President, and The Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister for Crown-Indigenous Affairs, sign the first ever self-government agreement between the Government of Canada and a Métis government, June 27, 2019. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Self-Governance

This describes a system that organizes people and ways of living that is controlled and directed by the inhabitants of a political unit rather than by an outside authority.



Self-Determination

The right of a people to decide their own destiny and their own education, political status, economic habits, and cultural and social traditions.¹⁷

"We want to govern ourselves.

We will accept no concessions."

—Louis Riel, quoted in the 2013 Manitoba Metis Federation Inc. vs Canada case. Manitoba Metis Federation Inc. vs Canada (Attorney General) et al., (2007) MBQB 293, para. 661.

The expression of Métis rights, however, resides in the sustained ability to make decisions about sustenance and resources, and the ability to adapt through time to a changing environment and dynamic social and political landscapes.

—Adam Gaudry, "*Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk*—'We Are Those Who Own Ourselves': A Political History of Métis Self-Determination in the North-West, 1830-1870" (PhD dissertation, University of Victoria, 2014), 29.

Autonomy

A right or condition free from external control or influence; independence.¹⁸



Figure 4. Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Advancing Reconciliation, Ottawa, January 30, 2017. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



Wahkohtowin

Being Related

Wahkohtowin is a concept valued in Métis communities that describes the importance of kinship among family and extended family and the relationships built with the natural and spiritual, human and non-human, and living and non-living worlds.¹⁹

In the governance systems of Métis in Alberta, *wahkohtowin* is a primary guiding knowledge of being related to one another. Métis have for generations established a community where reciprocity and group cohesion are necessary.²⁰ The sense of relatedness and the potential to make outsiders part of one's family is a foundational way of Métis being. *Wahkohtowin* informs the way Métis leaders define and classify relationships and behaviours between relatives, non-relatives, and communities in the complex web that constitutes the Nation.²¹ The connection of Métis people to both the land and familial relations is the basis for their understanding of the world, society, and political authority.²² Métis leaders have traditionally practiced *wahkohtowin* in their attempts to live in peaceful, mutually respectful, and beneficial relationships through international agreements and legislation.

Métis society placed obligations and responsibilities on individuals to ensure that the wellbeing of the collective was a primary cultural value. Mutual aid and support extended throughout Métis communities between large family collectives.

—Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Métis Culture in the Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 125.

The notion of relatedness that was integral to Métis communities was a principle passed and shared between generations of Métis women.²³ *Wahkohtowin* made the North-West a Métis Nation through the development and maintenance of relationships forged between Métis people within the territories of their mothers and grandmothers.

"The North West is also my mother, it is my mother country . . . and I am sure that my mother country will not kill me . . . because a mother is always a mother, and even if I have my faults if she can see I am true she will be full of love for me."

— Louis Riel, 1885, quoted by Morton Morton, *Desmond*, ed. 1974 *The Queen v. Louis Riel*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 312, cited in Jennifer Brown, "Women as Centre and Symbol in the Emergence of Métis Communities," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 3:1(1983) 44.

"It is my maternal [Indigenous] relations whose homelands, labour, and language that have been, and continue to be, the birthplace of my Métisness."

— Jennifer Adese, in Shaun Stevenson, "Mediating Métis Identity: An Interview with Jennifer Adese and Zoe Todd," *Media Tropes* 7, no. 1 (2017): 8.

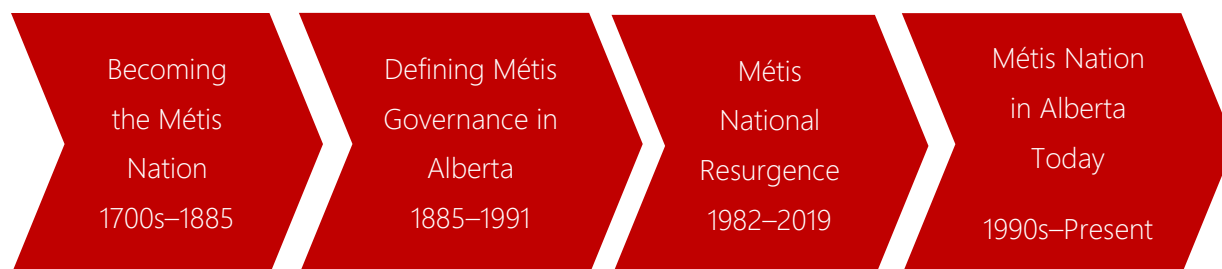


Figure 5. Christi Belcourt, "The Earth is My Government," 2018. Acrylic on Canvas, 130 x 183cm.



The History of Métis Nation Governance

The history of Métis governance in Alberta is founded upon the genesis of the Métis Nation across the **historic North-West**. The Métis first established nationhood during the Nation-wide buffalo hunts beginning in the late 1700s. In the early 1800s, Métis asserted a collective voice protecting their rights as **Indigenous** peoples for the first time. The major events of the Métis Nation, including resistance movements, are important factors surrounding the emergence of formal Métis Nation governance structures in Alberta in the 1900s. Métis had always stayed connected across the Homeland. The Nationwide successes of the Métis Nation are foundational to the work that the Métis Nation in Alberta is accomplishing today.



In Alberta, educators are required to recognize and understand the historical, social, economic, and political implications of legislation and agreements negotiated with Métis.²⁴ In learning about the history of Métis governance, educators will be invited to critically reflect on the agreements and legislation that Canada has made with and regarding Métis. Additional resources will support deeper learning about the agreements and legislation that Canada and Alberta have made with Métis.

Agreements

The Métis Nation has been petitioning to create agreements with the Government of Canada for over two centuries. These agreements have been and continue to be negotiations to address the rights, interests, and claims of the Métis Nation.

What agreements did Canada make with Métis? What agreements were never reached? Were agreements honored?

Legislation

Through the 1700s up to the 1980s, the Dominion of Canada, and later the Government of Canada, recognized the Métis only minimally in their legislation. In 1982, the Government of Canada explicitly acknowledged the Métis as a rights-bearing Aboriginal group. That recognition was foundational to four decades of legislation, enabling negotiations and agreements with the Métis Nation and the acknowledgement of its self-government.

What pieces of federal and provincial legislation in Canada acknowledge the Métis? Were Métis involved in establishing these laws? How did they impact Métis and the Métis Nation as a whole?



1700s–1885

Becoming the Métis Nation

The beginning of Métis history is often called the “birth of the Métis Nation,” or **ethnogenesis**, because of the unique emergence of the culture, traditions, languages, and governance structures in their distinct communities.

We were born as a people and developed as a Nation along the fur trade routes that wove the three prairie provinces—Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta—together with parts of Ontario, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and the Northern United States. This is the Métis Nation Homeland.

—“Background to Negotiations with Canada,” Métis Nation of Alberta, <http://www.albertametisgov.com/negotiations-with-canada/>.

In the early 1700s, the trade relationships between **First Nations** and **Euro-Canadians** in the area that would become Alberta flourished, and so did personal relationships. Together, they began families, and their offspring became the generations who began living lives distinct from their First Nations and Euro-Canadian **ancestors**.

These emerging generations formed the Métis Nation, who spoke several languages, including their own, the Michif language, developed distinct traditions, and formed their own unique culture. Their communities were recognized as distinct from other nations, most especially in the fur trade economy. Métis families were unified in their expressions of *wahkohtowin*, always valuing their community, network, and kinship across the regions of their Homeland.

Agreement

During the fur trade, Métis established many kinds of agreements with Euro-Canadians in their negotiated trading relationships. When Canada attempted to control the trade (see the Victory of Frog Plain) these agreements were broken.

Foundations to Métis Nation governance were forming as families lived in independent, unified communities. Métis lived independently throughout the year, gathering with family and their wider community for social and faith celebrations, in strategic economic movements such as the buffalo hunt, and to resist **colonial** imposition of the Euro-Canadian government, as necessary. They established agreements and rules that would meet their collective needs and lead them to build stronger relationships.

This era contains the establishment of the great buffalo hunts, the development of the Red River Settlement as a Métis cultural [centre], the collapse of the HBC trade monopoly, the negotiation of the Manitoba Act to create a confederal relationship with Canada, and the start of the exodus of Métis people from Manitoba due to immediate treaty violations and settler colonialism.

—Gaudry, “*Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk*,” 14.



The Buffalo Hunt

One of the most important traditional gatherings in Métis history was the buffalo hunt. Typically, Métis families would begin meeting in June, and, over the course of the warmer seasons, they would undertake at least three big hunts. It was a major effort to annually gather over a thousand people with all their required materials stored in the versatile **Red River Carts**.

Through the hunt, Métis could understand themselves as a web of kin relations, expressing a collective political will through an assembly of inter-related families, that choose a mutually agreed upon leadership.

—Gaudry, "*Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk*," 77.

On these hunts, the Métis would travel together with scouts sent ahead in search of the best **hunting** grounds for buffalo. Once these were located, the hunters would then meet and prepare to run the animals. The hunt unfolded in a very organized fashion. Because buffalo have a great sense of smell and hearing but poor eyesight, they could be approached from upwind. Once close enough to these massive animals, the **Chief Captain of the Hunt** gave the signal for a coordinated run. It was a great success to harvest many buffalo in one hunt. The hard work of preparing the meat for transport and long-term storage would be led by women. Once this vital phase had been accomplished, the carts would be full and ready for trade.

Governing the Hunt

Thousands of Métis families gathered to participate in a buffalo hunt camp. The organization of such a large gathering required effective leadership with shared responsibilities. Each year, hunts were announced in as many public spheres as possible, in churches and community gathering places, inviting everyone to join the buffalo-hunting caravan. Everyone's consent to participate in the hunt was represented through *otipemisiwak*, and the wider organization of the hunt by each family represented the value of working together, or *wahkohtowin*.²⁵

The heads of families would meet at predetermined times to select the Chief Captain of the Hunt, who then chose ten people to be **dizaines** (say: dee-zayns; ten captains), who would form the Council of the Hunt. These *dizaines* would also choose ten scouts and camp guards.²⁶



Figure 6. "Métis Camp with Red River Carts." Photo courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan: R-A3955.



The Council of the Hunt advised the Chief Captain of the Hunt with comments from the whole community of families. They would also select, oversee, and support the hunters, scouts, and guards in position for the duration of the hunt. The council was non-coercive and limited in its authority. In the spirit of *otipemisiwak*, decisions were subject to the consent of people in the community.

The daily affairs of the camp, as well as the daily raising of the Métis flag, would be governed by a guide. Throughout the hunt, a new guide would be selected from the *dizaines* each day. Camp criers were also selected to proclaim any instructions or news across the whole gathering.

Consensus was a consistent requirement of camp affairs, reflecting the core value of *wahkohtowin*. The selection of the captains, the Chief Captain of the Hunt, as well as the guides and camp criers were decisions made through communal agreement among the relations in the community. If any issues arose, the community would gather and decide how to address them together, whether the issue be regarding a certain leader, injustices within or external to the camp, or an unexpected situation.

The final task during the initial assembly of families was to determine the laws of the hunt through consensus. By 1840, eight rules were consistently agreed upon. These rules were first noted in writing by Alexander Ross, a Euro-Canadian settler who travelled with the Métis for the hunt one year.²⁷

"The organization of the buffalo hunt with its captains, chain of command and laws of the hunt evolved into an efficient, effective and democratic Bois-Brûlés government."

—"Bois-Brûlé" is another term referring to the Métis through history. Jean Teillet, *The North-West Is Our Mother: The Story of Louis Riel's People, The Métis Nation* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2019), 97. Bolding added.

Buffalo Hunt Rules

1. No buffalo to be run on the **Sabbath-day**;
2. No party to fork off, lag behind or go before without permission;
3. No person or party to run buffalo before the general order;
4. Every Captain with his men, in turn, to patrol the camp, and keep guard;
5. For the first trespass against these laws, the offender to have his saddle and bridle cut up;
6. For the second offence, the coat to be taken off the offender's back and be cut up;
7. For the third offence, the offender to be flogged;
8. Any person convicted of theft, even to the value of a sinew, to be brought to the middle of the camp, and the crier to call out his or her name three times, adding the word "thief" each time.

—Alexander Ross, *The Red River Settlement: Its Rise, Progress, and Present State* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1972). 249. Bolding added.

The governance structures of the buffalo hunt were consistent expressions of *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin*. These values were embedded in the ways of life in the Métis community and were later reflected in the governance structure of the Métis Nation.



Métis governance began as a family-level political system that would form a community governing body when needed.²⁸ The organization of the gatherings were reflective of *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin*, representing the interrelatedness of the communities. This decentralized system of governance has been mistaken for a lack of law by many non-Métis historians, when, in fact, decentralizing reflects the *otipemisiwak* of the Métis Nation.



Cuthbert Grant

Cuthbert Grant, born in 1793, was an esteemed leader in the Métis community and was selected as the Chief Captain of the Hunt for several years in a row. Grant also led the Métis in the Victory of Frog Plain, which established him as a widely celebrated Métis leader. It was in this event that, for the first time, the Métis asserted themselves in relationship with Canada as a Nation. Cuthbert Grant ignited the passion and unification of the Métis Nation and is regarded by many today as the first leader of the Métis Nation.

Figure 7. Cuthbert Grant (1800s). Photo courtesy of Archives of Manitoba: Margaret Arnett MacLeod fonds, C23/29 (N10612).

Governance through the Resistances in the Historic North-West

Throughout their history, Métis have come together as a Nation to collectively resist those imposing control of their communities and lands. Their determination to remain a strong, self-governing Nation fuelled their strength in a series of resistance battles throughout the 19th century.

Victory of Frog Plain (The Battle of Seven Oaks)

Métis had been independent trading partners with both Euro-Canadians and First Nations for a few decades by the early 1800s. Despite their equally negotiated trading relationship, the Dominion of Canada in **Red River** attempted to restrict the Métis from trading **pemmican** (a crushed, dried meat made with fat and berries). Métis asserted their freedom to trade, coming together under the leadership of **Cuthbert Grant** to capture Brandon House (or Fort Brandon), a Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) Post, in 1814.

The Dominion persisted with their trade restriction, and, in 1816, Cuthbert Grant led the Métis in seizing a stolen supply of pemmican from the HBC. After retrieving their pemmican, they encountered Canadian Governor Semple and his men, with whom they had an exchange of words before shots were fired. Within fifteen minutes, twenty settlers, including Governor Semple, died. This battle took place at a location known to the Métis as *la Grenouillère* (Frog Plain) and known in the colonial narrative as **Seven Oaks**.²⁹ The triumph of the Métis in this instance was a declaration of the independence, strength, and presence of the Métis Nation in the North-West.



Flying the Métis Flag: Declaration of "The New Nation"



Following the assertion of their distinct governance in the Victory of Frog Plain, the Métis began to gather under one flag. The infinity symbol in the flag's centre represents the joining of two cultures and the immortality of the new Nation. Today, the Métis recognize both red and blue versions of their flag as a symbol of their nationhood.

Figure 8. "Métis Flags, Red and Blue," Twitter user @TalkingRockTour, July 18 2018, <https://twitter.com/TalkingRockTour/status/1019824672131567616>.

Battle of Grand Coteau

The Battle of Grand Coteau (say: coh-toe) was a paramount display of Métis *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin*. Throughout the mid-1800s, Métis and Dakota Sioux (say: dah-koh-ta soo) First Nations had a series of territorial disputes over bison hunting grounds, which became a major conflict in 1851. The Métis were ambushed by the Dakota Sioux as they set up camp at Grand Coteau in 1851. In an act of self-defence, the Métis arranged their Red River Carts in a circle around their possessions, forming a **laager** (say: lah-ger) as a barricade.³⁰ The laager was used to ensure the safety of the women and children during the battle. Those who could handle guns, sixty-four Métis hunters and thirteen boys, awaited the imminent conflict.³¹

The Métis had no intention of surrendering to the Dakota Sioux, and they were able to hold up under three days of sustained attacks. Eventually, after making no dent in the Métis defences, the Dakota Sioux quit. By the end of the Battle of Grand Coteau, the Dakota Sioux had lost between eighty and ninety warriors, while the Métis had only lost one man. The Dakota Sioux then acknowledged the Métis' military prowess, dubbing them the "Masters of the Plains."³²

The Battle of Grand Coteau represents the Métis' efforts to preserve *otipemisiwak* when challenged by outsiders. Given the limited **kinship** relations with the Dakota Sioux during this time and no mutual relations to mediate the encounter, it would have been difficult for either camp to imagine an outcome other than violence.³³ The battle is reflective of the importance of *wahkohtowin* and the preservation of *otipemisiwak* to Métis during this time.

From the beginning of the Métis- [Dakota Sioux] engagement, from the initial meeting to the final moments of the battle, proper diplomatic protocol was regularly observed, it was only after both sides failed to recognize each other as relations, and after they had failed to successfully communicate their intentions to each other, that they readied their weapons.

—Gaudry, "Kaa tipeyimishoyaak," 160.



Foundations for Governance

In 1869–70 and 1885, the Métis established **provisional governments** to collectively address the control that Canada was imposing upon their communities. The foundations of *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin* carried on from the generations of buffalo hunt governance into this system.

As the trading activities of the HBC began to change and the Dominion of Canada's interest in expanding its boundaries grew, these entities looked to one another for a trade deal. With its sights set on acquiring **Rupert's Land**, the colonial government overlooked the fact that this land was the ancestral Homeland of the Métis. As the Métis grew aware of the land transaction between the HBC and the Dominion of Canada, it became evident that Canada sought to dismiss the Métis people and take over the Métis Homeland and territory as their own.



Figure 9. This artistic rendering illustrates the boundaries of Rupert's Land, the majority of which overlaps the Métis Homeland. Photo courtesy of Rupertsland Institute.

Red River Resistance

Without any consultation with or regard for the Métis living in the Red River area, Canadian Governor William MacDougall commissioned a group to illegally begin surveying the lands in the Red River Settlement. This sparked the formal resistance efforts of the Métis. Through the collective Métis effort to defend their lands, the Red River Resistance officially began on July 5, 1869.³⁴

Under the leadership of Louis Riel, the Métis formed a provisional government in Red River. This government aimed to address the Métis people's growing concerns that their nationhood in the Red River region and beyond was being ignored.

Provisional Government

The foundations for a provisional government were consolidated in 1869 under the name *Comité National des Métis de la Rivière Rouge*.³⁵ A provisional government is formed when an urgent need for political decision-making is required and is dissolved when this issue has been resolved. This structure included an executive leadership team with a president and a secretary/marshal, as well as a council of 12.

These leaders were committed to protecting the Homeland of their people. This meant that their main goal was to put a stop to the unauthorized settlement of the Canadian government and Euro-Canadian settlers.



Figure 10. Louis Riel and His Council, 1869–1870. Photo courtesy of the University of Manitoba Archives: uofm:9176.



John Bruce

Born in 1837, John Bruce was influential in the early establishment of the Métis Nation. He spoke English, French, and several First Nations languages, working as a carpenter and legal practitioner on behalf of the Métis. In October 1869, Bruce was elected as the first President of the Metis National Committee. He resigned this position due to illness shortly after, in December 1869, allowing Louis Riel to assume leadership of the Provisional Government. Bruce continued to serve as the Commissioner of Public Works in Riel's Provisional Government before retiring to North Dakota in 1874.

Figure 11. Detail from “Councillors of the Provisional Government of the Métis Nation” featuring John Brue, 1936. Library and Archives Canada / PA-012854.

A formal provisional government was declared, which was more representative of the Red River community with a larger legislative council, called the “**Convention of Twenty-Four**,” in a “Declaration of the People of Rupert’s Land and the North West.” On December 1, 1869, they defined “**The List of Rights**.”³⁶ The List of Rights outlined the proposed requirements for the Métis Nation and other communities in the Red River area to enter the Confederation forming in the east.



In 1870, another provisional government was declared, following an attempt to restore public peace when the Canadian Militia was given the order to reassume control of Upper Fort Garry. This provisional government, called the "**Convention of Forty**," was comprised of twenty French-speaking and twenty English-speaking delegates from the Red River Settlement, who would negotiate the terms of a public government. The members of this government had temporary roles and representative responsibilities.

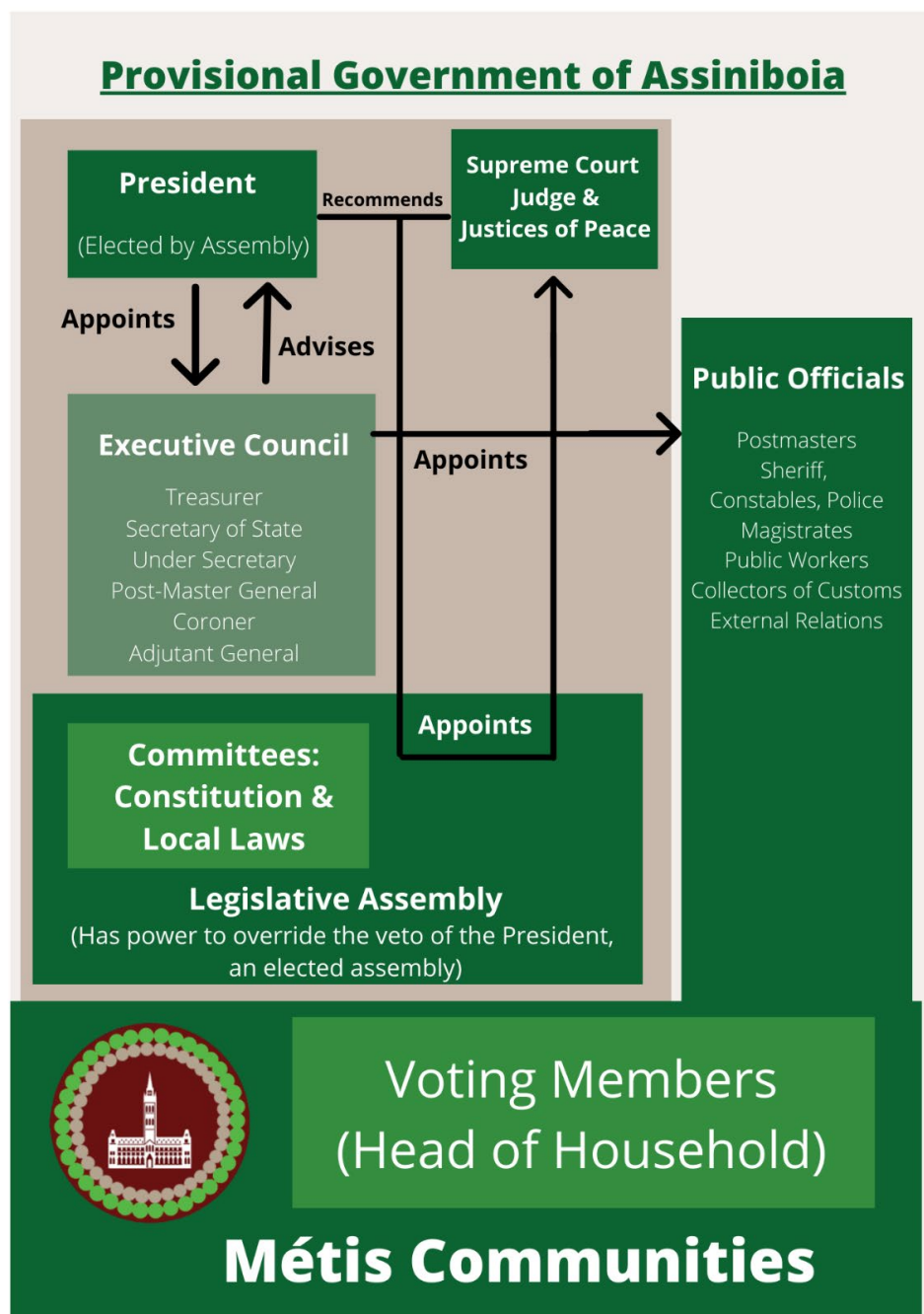


Figure 12. This image is an adaptation from the citation below, redesigned for clarity and to match the style of this document. Norma J Hall, "Definition: Provisional Government," <https://hallnjean2.wordpress.com/resources/definition-provisional-government/>. Site inactive.



Through this declaration of provisional government, the Convention of Forty not only dealt with the public tension of the time but also initiated the assertion of Métis nationhood through a political presence in colonial governments.

"This moment is a happy one for the Red River people—for we are determined to unite and be brethren henceforth [cheers]."

—Louis Riel, 1870, quoted in Second Provisional Government of Manitoba, 9 February 1870, Convention of Forty Debates.
<https://hcmc.uvic.ca/confederation/en/lgMBConv40-1870-02-09.html>

The union of the Convention of Forty brought about a great celebration as the Métis moved towards asserting their authority in the Red River area. The Convention of Forty held discussions about entering into the Canadian Confederation as a Métis Nation. In the early months of 1870, three Métis delegates were nominated to represent them in Ottawa to negotiate the terms of entry of the Métis Nation.³⁷ These discussions between Métis and Canadian officials resulted in a negotiated agreement between the Métis Nation and Canada, as well as a legislative act in Canada: **The Manitoba Act.** '

Legislation: The Manitoba Act

The passing of the Manitoba Act formally established Manitoba as Canada's fifth province on May 12, 1870. The Bill of Rights, which was issued by the Provisional Government, was fundamental to the establishment of the legislation. English and French language rights were safeguarded in the new legislature and the courts, as were Protestant and Roman Catholic educational rights. Not every aspect of the Bill of Rights was reflected in the Manitoba Act, and it is important to recognize the negotiation process that occurred on a nation-to-nation level between Canada and the Métis.

The Government of Canada made three promises to the Métis during the negotiation process:

1. "Métis land distribution would be supervised by the local legislature"
2. "There would be legislation to ensure that the lands would continue to be held by Métis families"
3. "Amnesty would be granted"

The legislation marked the legal resolution of the Red River Resistance. This authority was later ignored and redefined by the incoming Canadian government and its wish to expand its Dominion. The promises that were made were broken, and many Métis were cheated and pushed from their lands.

—Teillet, *The North-West Is Our Mother*, 226.



Louis Riel

Louis Riel was a hero and leader of the Métis Nation. He was born in Red River in 1844 to a large family. He was first educated in a Catholic school and then took up ministerial studies in a Catholic college in Montreal. When his father passed away, he withdrew from college and worked as a legal secretary, poet, and educator before entering the political scene as a leader in Red River in 1868. Riel was the son of a well-respected Métis leader, and was seen by his community as a young, articulate, well-educated, and selfless leader. Upon returning, he saw the plight of his people as Canadian **land surveyors** dismissed their Aboriginal title to land and nationhood. He played a critical role in the organization of the foundational governance structures of the Métis Nation.



Figure 13. Photograph of Louis Riel, 1884. Photo courtesy of University of Manitoba Archives: #PC107.

During this time, several Canadian militants, including **Orangemen**, were arrested and placed in Métis custody. Many of the prisoners later escaped. In a show of empathy, Riel freed the remaining prisoners on the condition that they stay out of the politics of the Settlement. The militants returned shortly thereafter and were arrested once again. Of the forty-eight men who were taken into custody, one, Thomas Scott had murdered a Métis man named “Parisien.”³⁸ He was arrested by Métis guards and held imprisoned pending trial.

Scott was an outspoken Orangeman (a militant Irish Protestant group), who continually taunted and attacked the guards in attempts to escape. He was brought through the Métis justice system, where he was tried before a council who, after hearing evidence against him, unanimously found Scott guilty and then sentenced him to death by a vote of five to two.³⁹ On March 4, 1870, he was executed by firing squad.⁴⁰

The procedure of a Métis trial was unique. It drew from three distinct legal traditions—British common law, France's criminal process, and Cree and Ojibwa justice systems.

— Teillet, *The North-West is Our Mother*, 217.

This execution was a catalyst for much controversy in the emerging Dominion of Canada, as responsibility for Scott's death was placed solely on Riel's shoulders. While Riel was forced into exile in the United States, Métis families remaining in Manitoba faced discrimination and racism.⁴¹ Canada sent in the **Red River Expeditionary Force**, who effectively drove Métis off their lands with threats and violence, even to the point of murdering several Métis leaders who remained in the area.⁴² Many Métis escaped the violence, leaving the Red River area to join their kin across the Homeland.



North-West Resistance

Despite its reign of terror in Red River, Canada continued to enter the Métis Homeland, and Métis families and communities continued to resist colonization.⁴³ The promise to give 1.4 million acres to Métis made in the *Manitoba Act* was virtually forgotten. Settler families continued to intrude on the lands of the Métis in Saskatchewan.

By 1884, frustrated with the influx of Euro-Canadian settlers into their Homeland, Métis issued a series of eighty-four petitions demanding that the Government of Canada acknowledge their rights as the Métis Nation. These resistance movements were an expression of *otipemisiwak*, in that the Métis sought the freedom to remain a free people, with their own space and community, distinct from the colonizing nation of Canada.

Provisional Government of 1885

In May of 1884, the Métis recognized that they needed help. On behalf of the Métis, Gabriel Dumont and James Isbister set out to Montana, where Riel had been living in exile.⁴⁴ Hearing of the continued struggles of his people, Louis Riel quietly returned to Canada to petition the government to acknowledge the rights and freedoms that were promised to the Métis.

Upon hearing the news that Canada was sending armed police to Batoche, the Métis established another provisional government in the area that would become Saskatchewan. This provisional government was led by the **Exovedate** (say: ex-o-ve-dât) and several Councillors. *Exovedate* is a Latin term coined by Louis Riel for the Provisional Government of Saskatchewan. Riel also coined the term “**Exovede**” (say: exo-veed), meaning “out of the flock,” for the name for his title as the *ex officio* leader of the Exovedate.⁴⁵

They created the “**Revolutionary Bill of Rights**” on March 8, 1885. The goal of the Bill was to get the Government of Canada to recognize the rights of Métis to their possessions and lands.

News of the Government of Canada's response to the Métis' Revolutionary Bill of Rights came ten days later, when the Métis heard that the Canadian **North-West Mounted Police** were coming to Batoche.⁴⁶ Passionate about the future of their Nation, Métis had voted to take up arms to protect the rights of their people.

Pierre Parenteau Sr. – President
Charles Nolin – Commissioner
Eugene C. Boucher – Assistant Secretary
Gabriel Dumont – Adjutant-General
Phillipe Garnot – Secretary

– The Council of the Provisional Government. Lawrence Barkwell, *Veterans and Families of the 1885 Northwest Resistance* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2011), 30.

The Adjutant-General played a leading military role. Gabriel Dumont, as an esteemed leader in the Buffalo Hunt, was entrusted with leading the military actions of the Métis Nation during this Resistance.



"It was done. The armed rebellion
had begun . . . no one ever
dreamed that a military
insurgence would come again.
Now it was here. In any case, we
had tried all peaceful means to
obtain our rights."

—Gabriel Dumont, quoted in *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*, trans.
Michael Barnholden, rev. 2nd ed. (Vancouver: Talonbooks,
2009), 48.



Figure 14. Abandoned Métis homestead at Batoche, c.
1950. Photo courtesy of Glenbow Archives: NA-3632-62.

Over the next few months, a series of three battles between the Métis and Canadian forces occurred. The initial Métis victory at the Battle of Duck Lake on March 26, 1885, as well as the Battle of Fish Creek on April 24, 1885, continued to fuel the Métis' passion to protect their communities. On May 9, the third and final battle occurred at Batoche. Although they were vastly outnumbered, the Métis courageously held out for three days. On May 12, the Métis ran out of ammunition; the Battle of Batoche had come to an end.

Following the defeat of the Métis at Batoche, where Euro-Canadian soldiers outnumbered the Métis ten to one, the Métis were overtaken, and Riel was found guilty of **treason**. Soon after, the Métis people dispersed across the Homeland. Many came to Alberta to join their Métis families who had settled in the communities that had been established during the fur trade.⁴⁷



Gabriel Dumont

Gabriel Dumont was and still is an esteemed leader in the Métis community. He was a famous leader of the Buffalo Hunt and public servant to the Métis community.

He became involved in the governance affairs of the Métis through his father beginning when he was thirteen, in 1851. Throughout this era, Gabriel Dumont was a mobilizer of *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin* for the Métis. He was a warrior, selfless in protecting the wellbeing of the Métis people.

Figure 15. Gabriel Dumont, c. 1880–1900. Photo courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board Photo Collection, Saskatchewan Archives Board: S-B-4277.1880-1900.



It is important to remember that, in this area and across the Homeland, Métis were being pushed out of their homes and communities by the newcomers. Métis were not rebelling against the Government of Canada because its control did not yet extend to their lands. Métis were defending their own Homeland against incoming colonial forces. Through their governance and in their actions, they were demonstrating *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin*, the central ways of knowing, being, and doing underlying the Métis worldview.

Dispossessed and Displaced by Canadian Legislation and Settlement

Following the conclusion of the National Resistance efforts, Métis **resilience** took on new forms. A series of new discriminatory legislation was introduced, and Euro-Canadian settlement continued to encroach upon the Métis Homeland. Families faced new levels of discrimination in their daily lives, which was intensified by the heightened racial divisions following the Resistance. Two of the most prominent experiences that Métis endured during this time were Canada's North-West Half Breed Commission (Scrip System) and becoming **Road Allowance** or **Squatting** Communities.

Canada's North-West Half Breed Commission

Following the North-West Resistance, Canada's **North-West Half-Breed Commission** was established to settle the land claims of the Métis. To have Métis relinquish their rights to their land, the Government of Canada created the Scrip System. Scrip is a document that was used as evidence of entitlement to something. Scrip was distributed by the Canadian government to Métis people so they could use it in exchange for valuable land or cash payments. This “redemption” of scrip coupons would thereby extinguish the **Aboriginal** land rights of the Métis.⁴⁸ It is now recognized that many land speculators from both America and Canada exploited the issuance of scrip to Métis as a tool to gain large amounts of land and resell it for a profit.

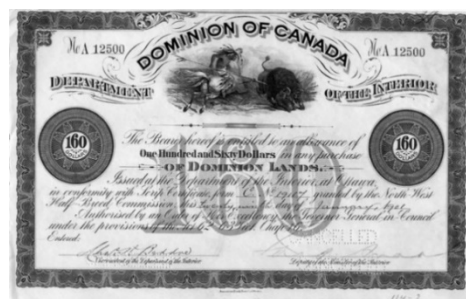


Figure 16. Scrip coupon for 160 dollars (CAD), issued to Andrew McAuley. Photo courtesy of Library and Archives Canada, LAC RG15, Vol. 1408.

Scrip is more fully explored in the Foundational Knowledge Themes *Métis in Alberta* and *Homeland History*. It is important to understand the way this type of seemingly lawful process affected the Métis Nation's governance in this period. After 1885, Métis leaders felt defeated. The unity of the Métis Nation was being systematically dismantled by the widespread fraud taking place through the scrip system.

The scrip system was rife with fraud and abuse.

The bulk of scrip ends up in the hands of land speculators; the Métis receive next to nothing for it. The Supreme Court of Canada has said that “the history of scrip speculation and devaluation is a sorry chapter in our nation's history.”

– Métis Nation of Alberta, “Timeline,”
<http://www.albertametisgov.com/timeline/>.



Figure 17. Scrip Commission meeting at an HBC post, Lesser Slave Lake, Alberta, 1899. Photo courtesy of Glenbow Archives: NA-949-18.



Becoming Road Allowance or Squatting Communities

During this same period, Métis across the Homeland continued to be pushed out of their homes and communities. Métis families relied on their network of *wahkohtowin* as they were pushed from their homes, and many joined friends and family across the Homeland. For some families, their displacement led them to squat in uninhabited areas, while others set up gathering places on lands set out by the government for the future development of roads, called “road allowances.” As the Euro-Canadian government worked to claim the lands, they did not recognize the rights of Métis to live in the homes they had known for generations; Métis were labelled “squatters” and “Road Allowance People” because of this. More information on these communities can be found in the *Métis in Alberta and Homeland History* Foundational Knowledge Themes.

Métis living in these communities faced a racist settler society that socially marginalized them and created a variety of challenges for Métis families, such as barriers to health care and employment. In the eyes of the colonial government, Métis who resided in road allowance and squatting communities did not have the right to live on the land where they resided. During this time, the Canadian government had a Eurocentric attitude that did not recognize the Métis Nation. As these communities continued to grow and develop, Métis found strength in their worldviews. *Otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin* were the guiding principles by which Métis were able to maintain resistance and resilience during this period. When the time was right, these foundational philosophies were used to regroup and reorganize.



Figure 18. Mrs. Belva Cardinal and Children at Rooster Town, 1951.
Photo courtesy of Winnipeg Tribune Collection, Department of
Archives and Special Collections, Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of
Manitoba: PC18/5874/18-5874-003.

"We were very poor. It was hard most days, and we struggled to eat every day. We lived in poverty with other Métis people. We were like a small community. It made me feel safe."

—Quotation from a Métis grandmother, recorded by Tana Terry, "Traditions in My Heart: Road Allowance Resilience," in *It Was a Good Life: Saskatchewan Métis Road Allowance Memories*, a living heritage project, Gabriel Dumont Institute and Heritage Saskatchewan, 4.



Defining Métis Governance in Alberta

1885–1991

Following the Resistance movements, many Métis feared for their own survival as the newly arriving Canadian settlers cast them into the role of traitors. This was also a time of hopelessness and despair as a once proud Nation faced mass dispersion and people adopted strategies to avoid racist attitudes and actions. This despair was later exacerbated by the Great Depression, which swept across the newly formed Dominion of Canada in the 1930s. Métis families were resilient through these challenges as they endured these situations and worked to care for their communities. Many Métis leaders emerged during this time to advocate for justice and the well-being and recognition of the Métis community in the land that would become Alberta.

St. Albert Métis Association

One of the first formal Métis governance structures in the area that would become Alberta was the St. Albert Métis Association. In 1897, Métis in present-day St. Albert established the St. Albert Métis Association. This organization was led by an elected president, and the membership conducted meetings using a formal parliamentary procedure. The Association advocated for the fair handling of Métis land claims and petitioned Ottawa for improvements to the flawed scrip system. Their petitions were ignored by the Government of Canada, and the organization dissolved quietly after some time. Nonetheless, the advocacy that these Métis leaders took up was foundational for organizations that would form a few decades later.



Lucy and Octave Bellerose
This leading Métis couple were founding presidential leaders of the St. Albert Métis Association.

Figure 19. Lucy and Octave Bellerose. Photo courtesy of St. Albert Historical Society fonds, CA MHM 2003-is-mhm-1098, Musée Héritage Museum, St. Albert, AB.

L'Association des Métis d'Alberta et les Territoires du Nord-Ouest

In 1905, Alberta became a confederated province. Canada passed responsibility for the Métis onto the provincial Government of Alberta, who acknowledged the Métis as a minority group in the province, rather than an Indigenous Nation. This constitutional quagmire concerning the Métis Nation created many jurisdictional issues.⁴⁹ Despite the lack of federal recognition, Métis were able to establish important foundations for the Nation in Alberta.

Métis in the Cold Lake and Fishing Lake areas gathered in 1928 under the leadership of Charles Delorme to form a provisional government in response to the upcoming federal legislation, the Natural Resources Transfer Acts of 1930. These acts would transfer control of natural resources to the provinces.



This governing entity was called **L'Association des Métis d'Alberta et les Territoires du Nord-Ouest**. For Métis, it was vital that the colonial government now in power not overlook and dismiss Métis title to the lands and resources that were not surrendered by scrip. They were also concerned about the impact of the land transfer on the Métis communities living on land the Crown claimed for itself. The Crown had promised many Métis specific lands, and this transfer agreement needed to be clear that the Province of Alberta would honour those promises to the Métis.

Charles Delorme

Charles was from the Métis community at Fishing Lake. He was determined to secure land for the Métis to call home. He became the founding leader in the creation of *L'Association des Métis d'Alberta et les Territoires du Nord-Ouest*. His efforts were foundational for the Métis Nation in Alberta today.



Figure 20. Charles Delorme.
Photo courtesy of G. Desjarlais. G. Desjarlais, "Desjarlais, Jack," *Heinsburg History*, <https://www.heinsburg.ca/desjarlais-jack>.

The executive leadership of *L'Association des Métis d'Alberta et les Territoires du Nord-Ouest* is referred to as the "Big Five" by Métis communities today. Joe Dion was the first president (shown below, front centre), with Malcolm Norris (front left), Felix Callihoo (back left), and Peter Tomkins (back right) serving as vice-presidents and James Brady (front right) as Secretary Treasurer.



Figure 21. The "Big Five" pose for a photo in Edmonton, 1935, taken after the association's name change to Métis Association of Alberta.

Photo courtesy of Glenbow Archives: PA-2218-109. Group portrait of the Provincial Executive Committee, Alberta Metis Association, Edmonton, Alberta.

Our first objective and the one in which we have our deepest interest, the one which more than anything else called our movement into being, is to see that adequate provision is made for homeless and destitute families.

—Minutes, 1932 Convention of L'Association des Métis d'Alberta et des Territoires du Nord-Ouest, M-331-11, Joseph Dion fonds, Glenbow Institute, Calgary, AB.



Becoming the Métis Association of Alberta (MAA)

In 1932, the *L'Association des Métis d'Alberta et les Territoires du Nord-Ouest* became the Métis Association of Alberta (MAA), representing thirty-one Métis communities across Alberta. This group of leaders were committed to alleviating Métis poverty in the northern regions of the province. They sought to create a secure land base for Métis in Alberta by lobbying the provincial government. The newly formed Métis Association of Alberta received a slow and minimalist response from the provincial government in recognizing their rights, including land rights, the right to live in traditional ways, and **harvesting** rights.

Establishing the Metis Settlements

The executive leaders of the MAA persistently lobbied the province of Alberta to take notice of their petitions. In 1934, the province finally responded. The *Royal Commission on the Condition of the Halfbreed Population of the Province of Alberta* was appointed as a provincial commission responsible for responding to Métis issues. They were mandated to study and report on Métis health, education, homelessness, and land issues. Judge Albert F. Ewing was appointed chairman, and the commission became known as the **Ewing Commission**.⁵⁰



Joseph F. Dion

Joe Dion was a founder, organizer, and President of the MAA. He is highly honored amongst Métis communities as a great leader, though he is not actually from a Métis family. Joe was enfranchised (had his federal recognition as an Indian person removed) but became kin with the Métis, especially those in Fishing Lake. His relationships with the Métis and the way he served the community are expressions of *wahkohtowin* in Métis governance.

Figure 22. Joseph F. Dion, 1960. Photo courtesy of Glenbow Archives: NA-2815-1.

Métis interests were represented by Joseph Dion, Malcom Norris, and Adrian Hope, who consistently attended the Commission's hearings on behalf of the MAA. After a two-year investigation, the Commission recommended that the province provide Métis residing in the northern regions of the province with a land base and adequate services. In response to the Ewing Commission's report and the continuous pressure from the MAA, the Government of Alberta adopted the **Metis Population Betterment Act** in 1938.

The commission is of the opinion that as the Métis were the original inhabitants of these great unsettled areas and are dependent on wildlife and fish for their livelihood, they should be given the preference over non-residents in respect of fur, game and fish.

—Government of Alberta, Ewing Commission Report, 1935. Quoted in Metis Settlements General Council, *Making History. Our Land. Our Culture. Our Future* (Edmonton: Metis Settlements General Council, 2005), 10.



Metis Population Betterment Act

This legislation allowed the Government of Alberta to create Orders-In-Council for the selection of lands to be set aside for Métis. Regulations for governance regarding hunting, **trapping**, building standards, grazing, use of road allowances, and other matters were outlined by the Province of Alberta in the Act. It recognized these lands set aside for Métis as **Metis Settlements**, which were commonly called “Metis colonies” by Métis and others at the time.

These original twelve Metis colonies were the first lands set aside for the Métis in Canada. The locations of the original twelve are shown on the accompanying map.

LEGISLATION

The *Metis Population Betterment Act* led to the establishment of distinct lands set aside for Métis communities to live and work on.

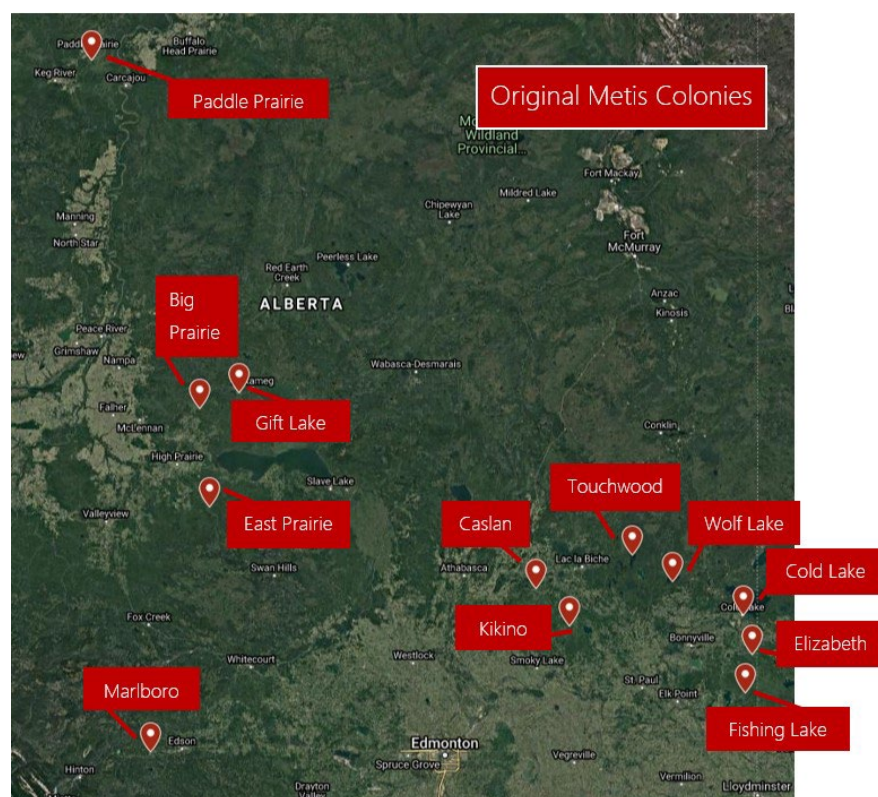


Figure 23. Métis Settlements in Alberta. Courtesy of Google Maps.

12 Original Metis Colonies

Paddle Prairie
Big Prairie
Gift Lake
East Prairie
Marlboro
Kikino
Caslan
Touchwood
Wolf Lake
Cold Lake
Elizabeth
Fishing Lake

Early Governance of the Métis Lands

The Government of Alberta appointed a “Metis Committee,” who organized Settlement Associations as allowed for in the *Metis Population Betterment Act, 1938*. These Settlement Associations were entrusted with the governance of the lands constituted as Metis Improvement Districts in the Act. Despite their activism and leadership in initiating the establishment of the Settlements, the Métis Association of Alberta’s leadership was not acknowledged as an authoritative body for Métis in the province.⁵¹

—Gerald Cunningham, “Metis Governance” (Aboriginal Governance and Partnership Workshop, The Metis Settlements General Council, Edmonton, AB, May 8, 2008), 3.



The Government of Alberta “hired ‘Colony Supervisors’ for each of the Metis Colonies.”⁵² Métis leaders were effectively displaced from leading their own people, which becomes apparent when reviewing the correspondence between Métis leaders and the Government.⁵³

Minister hired "Colony Supervisors" for each of the Metis Colonies; two of which were original members of the Metis Association of Alberta (MAA) . . . it caused animosity amongst the "Big Five" as two were now deemed government. employees.

—Cunningham, "Metis Governance," 4.

Métis have lived resiliently for generations. Some Métis families from around the province moved to these distinct lands and established infrastructure and homes. Many of the people who lived on the Settlement remained connected to the Métis Association of Alberta, even though the Government of Alberta did not recognize their leadership. These families maintained their relationships with Métis around the province and Homeland, celebrating the traditions of their community, such as attending the annual Lac Ste Anne **Pilgrimage**, attending the Metis Association of Alberta Assemblies, and continuing to live out their culture. Although the Metis Settlements were created for all Métis citizens in Alberta, most Métis did not choose to move there.

"We moved to Elizabeth Colony in 1965, I was 2 years old, my family wasn't much into the politics of the Colony, as it was administered by the Alberta Government. We had supervisors, who were white that looked after the day-to-day business.

"However, in the 1970's, I remember going to Metis Assemblies, in Athabasca, Alberta, in those days everyone pronounced the word Metis as 'Meeedis', this is where everyone would vote for the President of the Metis Association of Alberta, the one I remember the most was Stan Daniels, I liked him because he had these awesome campaign buttons that said 'Stan the Man' on them. We had a lot of fun, each Colony had their own part of the field, we camped in, if you didn't have a tent, one would be provided for you. I remember them as a time of gathering with family and friends, with lots of music and dancing! It was a time when we were all one, we didn't know there was a difference from those of us who lived on the Colony and those who didn't."

—Marilyn née Wells, Unterschultz/Lizee, personal communication with RCTL, February 18 2021.



Though the Métis voice was acknowledged to a minimal extent in the governance of these lands, the paternalistic control by the Government of Alberta increased. By 1960, Métis had to leave four colonies: Marlboro, Touchwood, Wolf Lake, and Cold Lake.⁵⁴

"Between 1938 and 1961, two of the settlements did not form associations and two were rescinded. This reduced the Settlement areas to eight, which make up approximately 1.25 million acres of land."

—Then-President Gerald Cunningham, Metis Governance: The Metis Settlements General Council, Aboriginal Governance and Partnership Workshop "Metis Governance," 4.

PaddlePrairie
EastPrairie Peavine
Settlements Today
Elizabeth Kikino
FishingLake
GiftLake BuffaloLake

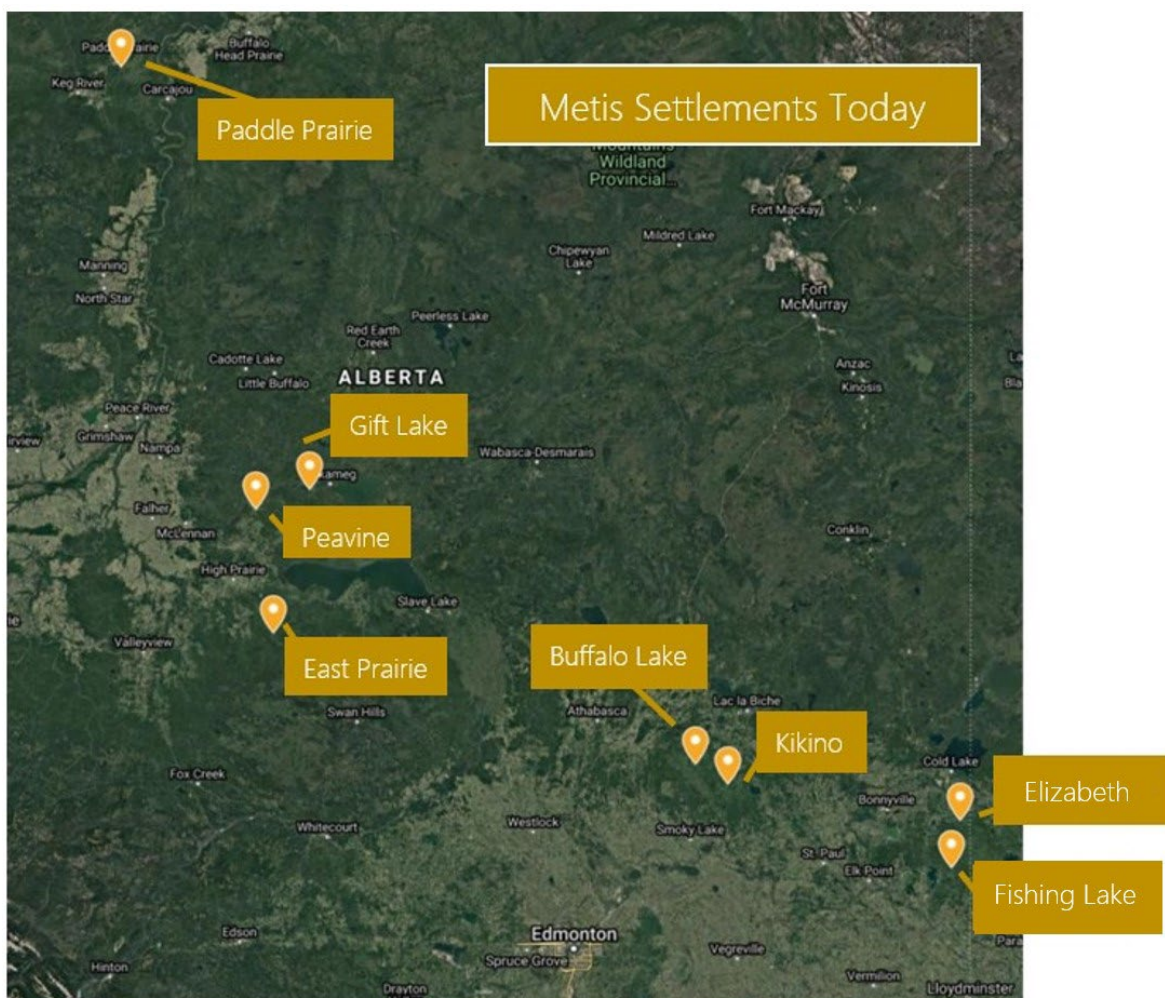


Figure 24. Metis settlements today. Courtesy of Google Maps.



"As a child I grew up in the 1950/60s with my maternal great-grandparents who were among the first residents of the Fishing Lake area in 1928. They were born in the 1880s and their parents are traced back to St. Boniface, MB. and to the Métis members of the Paspaschase clan near Fort Edmonton. They came from the "free people" who became colonized as Canada expanded westward. Due to their timeline in birth and early childhood, they endured the immediate hardships and fallout from the Crown's effective control over Indigenous peoples including the loss of land; government imposed limited **mobility**; the Métis Scrip process; the Reign of Terror; and living in destitute on the fringe of Settler communities; all of which led to the early political ramblings of the Métis Association near Fishing Lake. This was their reality which shaped their mindset - including the dark and economic turmoil of two world wars and the Great Depression.

"After church on Sundays, my Great-Grandpa and his friends would gather for a meal at our house where they would visit for hours discussing Métis politics. I remember the discussions would get pretty heated and at certain points my Great-Grandma would step in and tell the men 'it's time to take a break - go outside and have a smoke.' I had no idea what they were talking about, but I would hear words like 'Métis Association . . . Joe Dion . . . Adrian Hope . . . Colony Supervisor . . . Council . . . that damn Government . . . and it's our land,' with fists often pounding on the table and the tea spilling over onto my **bannock** and jam.

"Playing with my cars on the floor, this was an exciting atmosphere while scary at the same time, and in hindsight I wish I had paid more attention. Little did I know, that on my father's side, the Dumont clan had its own heroic impact and direct links to the events in the 'historic northwest' from which the genesis of the Métis Nation arose. These gatherings and the spirit of 'wahkotowin' inspired my sense of duty as a child, and those late Sunday meetings became my link to the Métis Nation of Alberta, a place where I came to work in the 1990s, and where I chose to stay and make my own contributions to the present day."

—Lorne Gladu, CEO of Rupertsland Institute, personal correspondence with RCTL, March 2, 2021. Bolding added.



Formalizing Métis Nation Governance within Alberta

Though the Métis had limited governance over the Settlement lands set aside in the early years, Métis continued to gather and advocate for their communities as the MAA. They established an **Annual General Assembly (AGA)**, in which they met every year to collectively determine their next steps as a Nation.

In 1960, the provincial government unilaterally closed down two of the colonies: Cold Lake and Wolf Lake. When the MAA attempted to protest this move, Hope (who had been elected president that year) was told by government officials that the MAA did not officially exist, since it had never been legally registered. [...] Even though the colonies represented a membership of less than 5 percent of the total Metis population of the province, Hope saw the MAA as representing the colonies.

—Joe Sawchuk, *The Dynamics of Native Politics: The Alberta Métis Experience* (Vancouver: UBC Press, Purich Publishing, 1998), 57–58.



Figure 25. Adrian Montrose Hope, Grouard, 1978.
Photo courtesy of Denis Wall,
<https://sites.ualberta.ca/~walld/amh.html>.

Adrian Hope

Adrian Hope was born in 1903. Over his lifetime he was a rancher, rodeo cowboy, movie extra, poet, fisherman, educator, and an important political leader. He served as the president of Métis Association of Alberta through the 1960s, as well as the first president of the Federation of Metis Settlements in 1975. He was known to say: "I count my riches in my friends."

—Lawrence Barkwell, "Adrian Hope (1903–1986)," Metis Heritage and History Research, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/db/11102>.

Registering the Métis Association of Alberta with the Province

In 1961, under the leadership of Adrian Hope, the MAA formally registered as an association under the *Alberta Societies Act*. It is important to remember that the Métis were not viewed as an Indigenous Nation by the government, rather, as a minority that came under the jurisdiction of the province. Registering as a society established a formal relationship, albeit a limited one, with the Province of Alberta. It was also foundational to accessing funding from the government. This next step revitalized the Métis in Alberta and empowered them to begin establishing the organization and movements that would meet the needs of all Métis in the province.⁵⁵

Hope finally got the association registered in 1961. The constitution and bylaws submitted to the government, along with the application for official registration, were modelled on those Brady had prepared some twenty years before, with a few minor alterations Hope felt would allow the constitution to be more readily accepted.

—Sawchuk, *The Dynamics of Native Politics*, 59.



Adrian Hope retired in 1967, and Stan Daniels was elected to succeed him as leader.⁵⁶ During the 1970s, through amendments to the MAA bylaws, they defined the Board of Directors (a precursor to the contemporary Provincial Council) and the six zones (precursors to the contemporary Regions of the Métis Nation of Alberta).

Stan Daniels

Stan Daniels was born in St. Paul, Alberta in 1924. Stan served the Métis Nation for many years in a variety of roles. In addition to being elected president of the Métis Association of Alberta three times, he was also a political leader for organizations advocating for the rights of Indigenous people across Canada. He also was one of the key founders of the Alberta Native Communications Society and the Alberta Native Education Foundation.

Stan Daniels first attracted public attention in 1966 by hitchhiking across Canada to Ottawa to present Prime Minister Pearson with a pound of sausage purchased from a White-operated store in northern Native communities; sausage that was priced at over three times the current price in southern, urban communities.

—Sawchuk, *The Dynamics of Native Politics*, 62.



Figure 27. Ballot casting at a Métis Association Annual Assembly in the 1970s. Photo courtesy of Provincial Archives of Alberta: PR1999.0465.0275.0017.



Figure 28. Métis gathered at the 1973 Annual General Assembly. Photo courtesy of the Métis Nation of Alberta.



Figure 26. Stan Daniels. Photo courtesy of Provincial Archives of Alberta: PR 1999.465/275-38.

Métis have been gathering at Annual Assemblies to address new initiatives or issues, elect new leaders, sign petitions, establish and amend bylaws, and celebrate their culture for decades. These gatherings have always been expressions of *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin*. Métis in Alberta have diligently worked for over a century to govern themselves through a formal self-government process. They have been petitioning the Province of Alberta and the Government of Canada to acknowledge their presence and land rights for generations, under several determined, charismatic, elected leaders.

Their work of **self-governance** is also the expression of *wahkohtowin*. Gathering annually in various locations all across the province is more than just political action. Assemblies are opportunities to hear each other's ideas and concerns, rekindle friendships, and visit with relatives. Celebrating their culture, languages, and traditions has been an essential part of the annual gathering for generations.



Wahkohtowin is also expressed in the relationships built and strengthened through the invitations that Métis leadership extend to non-Métis government leaders to attend and learn more about the Métis.

Metis Population Betterment Trust Account – Provincial Financial and Political Accountability

The Métis Association of Alberta has, from its very foundations, striven to represent and advocate on behalf of all Métis in the province, including those Métis living on the Settlements.⁵⁷ In 1968, those living on the Settlements raised concerns about the handling of resource revenues raised from Settlement lands. The case was brought to court in 1969 under the primary **plaintiff** Richard Poitras, a member of the Paddle Prairie Settlement. The plaintiffs were seeking "a declaration that revenues received by the Crown from any disposal of the mines and minerals on lands set aside for the settlement of members of the Metis Settlement Association should be paid into the Metis Population Betterment Trust Account."⁵⁸

However, when the MAA initiated **litigation** to account for the resource revenues and expenditures of the eight Metis Colonies, the Province of Alberta denied all claims because President Stan Daniels was not considered an official member of the Settlements.⁵⁹ Just as had been done in the 1920s and 1930s, the Government of Alberta interfered with the leadership and self-governance that Métis were initiating for their communities and the lands they lived on.

The branch and the Metis Betterment Act were both mechanisms by which the Province of Alberta tried to replace the Metis association and its independent charter with a toothless, government-designed and government-approved organization.

–Sawchuk, *The Dynamics of Native Politics*, 63.

A statement of claim was filed in the Supreme Court of Alberta on February 5, 1974, for revenues from oil and gas development, "Keg River Metis Settlement Association v Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Alberta action."⁶⁰ This process was a catalyst for the establishment of the Federation of **Metis Settlements** in 1975, which was followed by a second statement filed as a class action on behalf of the Settlement Associations and their members in "Maurice L'Hirondelle et al v. Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Alberta, Action No. 83520" on July 6, 1977.⁶¹ The two actions were joined together under the Settlements Association.⁶² Fifty years after the *Betterment Act*, an out-of-court agreement was signed between the Federation of Metis Settlements Association and the Government of Alberta, in 1998.⁶³ The agreement provided "land, compensation, and legislative reform intended to enable the Métis to establish a form of local self-government."⁶⁴



Figure 29. Premier Peter Lougheed attending the Métis Association of Alberta's 1973 Annual General Assembly. Photo courtesy of Provincial Archives of Alberta: PR1999.0465.0275.0038.

1969 – The MAA President initiates litigation of the Province for accounting of resource revenues and expenditures for the 8 Metis Colonies. The Province denied this litigation because the MAA President was not an official member of one of the Metis colonies.

–Cunningham, "Metis Governance," 5.



Federation of Métis Settlements

"The Mandate of the Federation:

- ∞ To protect the settlement lands
- ∞ To take legal action against the province for alleged improper handling of subsurface resource revenues in relation to the Métis Population Betterment Trust Fund; and
- ∞ To attain local government **autonomy** for the Settlements."

—Cunningham, "Métis Governance," 5. Bolding added.

"The most important thing about the settlements is that they gave the Métis people a land base. No matter where they go now, they always have a home to go back to."

—Robert Aulotte, Elder at Fishing Lake Métis Settlement, 1979, quoted in Métis Settlements General Council, *Making History. Our Land. Our Culture. Our Future*, 35.

Growth in the Métis Association of Alberta

Throughout the early years, Métis in Alberta donated their own money to see the Nation strengthened. In 1967, the Métis Association of Alberta was able to access funding through the Company of Young Canadians (CYC) federal program aimed at helping "Canadian youth to do volunteer work."⁶⁵ At that time,

[T]o qualify for funding, the [MAA] had to agree to represent all Métis in the province and not just those on the colonies.

—Sawchuk, *Native Politics in Alberta*, 60–61.

the only way the Métis Nation was allowed access to funding was through their volunteer support of Métis in Alberta. One CYC employee recalls the systemic barrier Métis faced as an Aboriginal people, recalling that "no **Indians** as a group of Indians are going to get any money (i.e. from the existing system) to do anything."⁶⁶ Overcoming this barrier was the first step of many in the growth of the MAA.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the MAA began to access federal and provincial funding, which allowed for a radical expansion of its operations and services, as it eventually served over 20,000 Métis in the province.⁶⁷ This funding was in the form of federal and provincial grants. It was important because it allowed the MAA to "turn its attention from rebuilding its membership to developing specific programs aimed at improving living conditions for Métis in Alberta."⁶⁸ This included the establishment of departments meeting specific needs, such as "communications; health and welfare; employment and job opportunities; land tenure; economic development; housing; youth, culture, recreation; and education."⁶⁹

By early 1972 the MAA could boast sixty locals organized throughout the province, a remarkable figure. . . . The association estimated that, when community and kinship ties were taken into account, these sixty locals represented at least twenty thousand Métis who had direct or indirect contact with the association.

—Sawchuk, *The Dynamics of Native Politics*, 65.



MAA – Alberta Framework Agreement

In 1987, just a few years after the Constitutional victory of 1982, which secured Métis Aboriginal rights under Section 35(2), which is often shortened to “s.35(2),” the Métis Association of Alberta became the first Métis government to sign a **Framework Agreement** with a provincial government. This was an important step in the relationship between the Province of Alberta and the MAA.

A Framework Agreement was created to formalize the recognition that the two parties had not come to a final agreement on all issues relevant to their relationship. However, they did agree on enough matters to move forward in a working relationship. The agreement also enabled discussions of upcoming issues as required.

AGREEMENT

The *MAA – Alberta Framework Agreement* was foundational to the work of the Métis Nation of Alberta through the early 2000s.



"The framework agreement provides the MAA with stable, predictable funding to pursue the priorities of the Métis Nation within Alberta."

– Métis Nation of Alberta, "Timeline."

Figure 30. Signing of Original Framework Agreement, 1988. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Each of these victories was a stepping stone in the expression of *otipemisiwak* in Alberta. The Framework Agreement was one of many steps Métis took towards having their self-government recognized by the Province of Alberta. During these fundamental years, Métis established many services for their communities in Alberta.

1982 - Métis Urban Housing Corporation of Alberta Inc. incorporated

1985 - Métis Child and Family Services established

1986 - Alberta Métis Historical Society established

1991 - Métis Education Foundation established

1992 - Cree Productions (1992) Inc. incorporated

1997 - Métis Nation Holdings Inc. incorporated

1970—The MAA Board members support the formation of the Alberta Federation of Metis Settlements Association (AFMSA) and provides per capita funding for three years.

—Cunningham, "Metis Governance," 6.

The MAA established affiliates to strengthen services to the Métis across the province in the 1970s and 1980s. They continued to work with Métis living on the Settlements with the many services they were establishing, including funding to the communities for three years.



Alberta–Metis Settlements Accord

Métis living on the Settlements were persistent in their aspiration to secure and govern the lands for their communities as a self-determining and self-reliant people. A distinct "made-in-Alberta" approach was defined as the leaders in the Settlements worked with then-Premier Peter Lougheed.⁷⁰

On July 1, 1989, the Metis Settlements signed the *Alberta–Metis Settlements Accord* with the Province of Alberta. This was an essential step in "defining the principles of their new relationship," and would lead to legislation allowing Métis in the Settlements to express *otipemisiwak* distinct from the control of the Government of Alberta.⁷¹

The Accord called for joint action to:

- ∞ secure Settlement lands in the Canadian Constitution
- ∞ establish local and central Metis governments; and to
- ∞ build viable and vibrant Metis communities.

– Cunningham, "Metis Governance," 6.

AGREEMENT

Alberta–Metis Settlements Accord redefined the way that Métis living on Settlements could address concerns in their relationship with the Government of Alberta.

In many ways the Accord enabled the Métis Settlements to achieve unprecedented levels of social, economic, community and political development.

– Métis Settlements General Council, *Making History: Our Land. Our Culture. Our Future*, 17.

1990 – Four Key Pieces of Legislation

The signing of the *Alberta–Metis Settlements Accord* was foundational to four new pieces of legislation regarding the governance of the Settlements: the *Metis Settlements Act*, *Metis Settlements Land Protection Act*, *Metis Settlements Accord Implementation Act*, and the *Constitution of Alberta Amendment Act*.

The *Constitution of Alberta Amendment Act* acknowledges Métis, protects the lands of the Settlements, and affirms that no legislation can be construed as taking away from the Aboriginal rights of Métis as defined in the Canadian **Constitution Act, 1982**.⁷²

The *Metis Settlements Act* established the Settlement Councils and the Metis Settlements General Council as official corporations. It also provided for the co-management of oil and gas development on Settlement lands.⁷³

LEGISLATION

Constitution of Alberta Amendment Act

Metis Settlements Act

Metis Settlements Land Protection Act

Metis Settlements Accord Implementation Act



The *Metis Settlements Land Protection Act* defines the transferring of letters patent and "control over access." ⁷⁴

The *Accord Implementation Act* implemented the financial elements that were defined in the *Alberta–Métis Settlements Accord*, including the seventeen-year funding and accountability framework. ⁷⁵

Figure 31. Metis Settlements Proclamation Day, 1990.
Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

The Establishment of Metis Settlements General Council

With the enactment of these Acts, Métis continued their expression of *otipemisiwak* as they began to operate as the Metis Settlements General Council (MSGC). For the first time, the Settlements were governed by a Métis framework. In the Acts, the Settlements were named as the communities had determined.

These four pieces of legislation also allowed for the establishment of Métis-led initiatives to serve those living on Settlements.

Journey towards Self-Governance:

Métis Nation of Alberta

Continuing their journey to self-governance, the MAA officially changed their name to the "Métis Nation of Alberta Association" in 1991. This was done to assert their nationhood and declare their intention to establish formal relationships with both the federal and provincial governments.



Figure 32. Peter Campiou, Region 5 Vice-President (left), and Gary Gaudet, Region 6 Vice-President (right), 1988. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

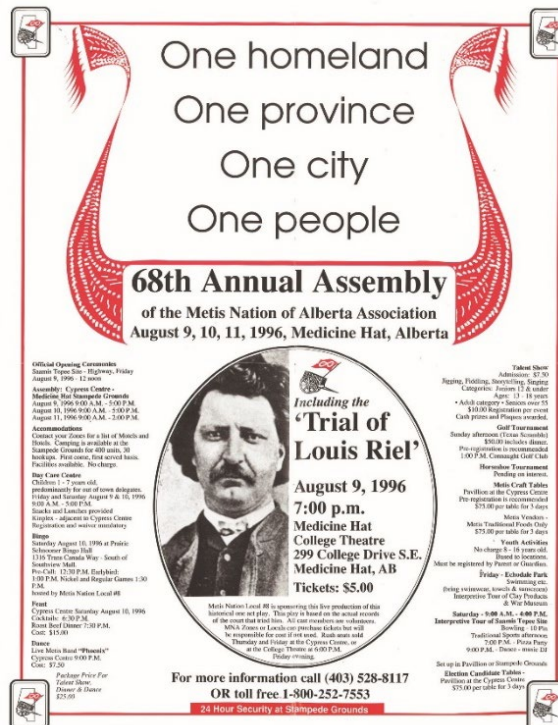


Figure 33. Métis Nation of Alberta Association Annual Assembly poster, 1996. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



1982–2019

Métis Nation Resurgence

Across the Homeland in the late 1900s, the Métis Nation was entering a resurgence. The monumental growth of the Métis Nation was taking place across the Homeland, as Métis established formal governing bodies, formed organizations, and addressed their relationships with their respective provincial governments and the federal government.

Métis around the Homeland were resiliently working to advocate for their families and Nation amidst many staggering challenges. Communities across the Nation were facing generations of displacement from their homes and lands. Many were living as squatters or on road allowance lands. Others were hiding from violent discrimination and racism and surviving the **Residential and Industrial school** systems and **the Sixties Scoop**. These experiences that Métis endured should be remembered, as many Métis leaders were working to address them by pursuing advocacy and justice. Learn more about these experiences in the *Métis in Alberta* and *Homeland History* themes.

In the 1960s the Métis Nation reorganized in the Prairies. The catalyst for the reorganization was the same threat the Métis had always faced: displacement. . . . New leaders took over the reins. Stan Daniels was the Métis Association of Alberta's president. Howard Adams, Rod Bishop, and Jim Sinclair were working in Saskatchewan, and when the Manitoba Metis Federation officially organized in 1967, its new president was Adam Cuthand. By the 1970s the search was on for something more than provincial organizations.

—Teillet, *The North-West Is Our Mother*, 437.

The Métis Nation began to reorganize and establish official organizations in their respective provinces by the 1970s and 1980s. With their own individual organizations established, they began to come together to form a plan to address the historical and contemporary injustices they all faced collectively.⁷⁶

The "executives of the provincial Metis and Non-Status Indian associations of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba" gathered to establish a national collective body, the Native Council of Canada (NCC).⁷⁷ This became an organization through which both Métis and **non-status Indians** advocated for their people on a federal level. However, it became apparent within the next decade, especially after the Métis' inclusion in the *Constitution Act* (1982), that the Métis needed a distinct national voice by which to represent themselves (i.e., the Métis National Council).

The Métis Nation continued to express *otipemisiwak* as they came together as the NCC. In their coming together to collectively represent and advocate for their kin across the Homeland, *wahkohtowin* was further cemented as a way of being and leading in the governance of the Métis Nation in Alberta.



Figure 34. Native Council of Canada logo. Photo courtesy of Gabriel Daniels.



Métis Federally Recognized: *Constitution Act, 1982*

The determination for justice was a resounding theme in the Métis Nation through these decades. By the 1980s, Métis leaders of the NCC were persistent in their lobbying of the provincial and federal governments. One of the leaders who emerged was Harry Daniels, previously Vice-President of the Métis Association of Alberta (1971–72). He actively challenged the idea that Métis could be denied or suppressed during the constitutional debates.⁷⁸ It was proposed that the *Constitution Act* would include a general acknowledgement of the "aboriginal peoples of Canada."⁷⁹ Daniels, alongside lawyers and many Métis leaders, celebrated the victory of having Métis explicitly included as one of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada in a last-minute amendment.⁸⁰

[Then-Prime Minister Pierre] Trudeau was greatly attached to his "two founding nations" idea, the theory that Canada was founded by the English and French nations. [Harry] Daniels attacked that idea. There were not two founding nations. In fact, the Métis Nation was a politically independent nation when it joined Canada.

—Teillet, *The North-West Is Our Mother*, 440.

This victory meant that Métis were finally officially recognized by Canada as an Aboriginal people.

35. (1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.
(2) In this Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

—The *Constitution Act, 1982*, Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982 (UK)*, 1982, c 11.

Though the *Constitution Act* does not use the term "nation," this clarification gave "protection to the rights of Aboriginal collectives."⁸¹ This allowed the Métis Nation to begin the process of holding both Alberta and Canada accountable for their histories in a **nation-to-nation** relationship.

Renewing Understanding about Métis Identity in Canada

The inclusion of Métis as a distinct Aboriginal people in s.35(2) of the *Constitution Act, 1982* is fundamental to the understanding that the Government of Canada, and many other Canadians, have about Métis **identity**. Prior to 1982, the legal terminology acknowledging any **Indigeneity** was the term "Indian," taken from the *Indian Act, 1876*. "Aboriginal peoples" became the collective, legal distinction, making space for "Indian, Inuit, and Métis" in the legal framework of Canada's Constitution. Both "Indian" and "Aboriginal" are legal terms. The term "First Nations" is considered more respectful than "Indian."

The inclusion of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (often referred to as "**FNMI**") invites others to acknowledge each of these distinct people groups. Many Canadians have been learning about each of their distinct cultures, languages, traditions, and histories. However, despite the unique identifications for each of these groups, many have limited their understanding by using the homogenizing acronym FNMI. Some Alberta educational publications use this acronym even though it ignores "the complexity and diversity of Alberta's Aboriginal peoples."⁸² It is important that educators develop for themselves and their students the understanding that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit are unique people groups.



Governance across the Homeland: Métis National Council

As the NCC operated throughout the 1970s, Métis and Non-status Indians collectively "put pressure on the Government of Canada to be included in benefit programs that were available."⁸³ Unfortunately, the issues raised by the different Métis, Inuit, and

First Nations groups were still being heard as if they were being raised by a single minority of "Indian" people. This attitude began to shift with the recognition of Métis as distinct in the *Constitution Act, 1982*. As the unique needs and rights of the Métis people became clearer, it also became evident that the Métis Nation needed an organization to represent their own people.



Figure 35. Métis National Council logo,
<https://www2.metisnation.ca>

Prior to the holding of the constitutionally guaranteed First Minister Conference to further identify and define the rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, it became apparent that the Métis Nation needed to be able to represent itself at a national level through its own voice
—a Métis voice.

– Métis Nation of Ontario, "Governance: Métis National Council," <https://www2.metisnation.ca/about/governance/>.

On March 8, 1983, representatives from the Manitoba Métis Federation, the Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan and the Métis Association of Alberta were the founding members of this first national Métis representative body. In the following years, the Métis National Council (MNC) expanded to include Métis organizations from British Columbia, Ontario, and the Northwest Territories. The MNC is a collective entity formed by the individual Métis governments across the Homeland. It has served as a political representative body for Métis on a national and international scale, working to ensure a "healthy space for the Métis Nation's on-going existence within the Canadian federation."⁸⁴

Canada establishes the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP)

The Métis around the Homeland continued to assert and define their nationhood. The Government of Canada mandated the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) in 1991 to investigate the relationship that the Canadian Government and society had with Aboriginal groups across Canada. They were also commissioned to propose solutions to address the challenges that were being raised by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. In their report, the Métis were acknowledged as a distinct Nation with whom Canada needed to work honourably through negotiations and resolutions.



The RCAP was established by Order-in-Council on August 26, 1991. It submitted a report on the findings and offered solutions in October 1996. It comprises five volumes: Looking Forward, Looking Back; Restructuring the Relationship; Gathering Strength; Perspectives and Realities; and Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment.⁸⁵ Volume 4 of the RCAP, Perspectives and Realities, includes an entire section on Métis perspectives. There is a list of several recommendations reiterating the need to establish a nation-to-nation relationship between the Métis Nation and the Canadian Government.

Governance-specific recommendations pulled directly from the RCAP Report:

4.5.1: Political negotiation on a nation-to-nation or analogous basis be the primary method of resolving Métis issues.

4.5.3: The government of Canada either

(a) acknowledge that section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867 applies to Métis people and base its legislation, policies, and programs on that recognition; or

(b) collaborate with appropriate provincial governments and with Métis representatives in the formulation and enactment of a constitutional amendment specifying that section 91(24) applies to Métis people.

4.5.9: Federal, provincial and territorial governments

(a) be prepared to enter into temporary land use agreements with Métis nations while land claims negotiations are pending or continuing; and

(b) be prepared, where appropriate, to consider longer-term land use agreements with Métis nations, perhaps in association with other interests, Aboriginal or private.

4.5.10: The governments of Canada and of relevant provinces and territories

(a) be prepared to negotiate immediately with appropriate Métis representatives (as well as, where appropriate, other Aboriginal governments) on the manner in which Métis self-government will be recognized by and integrated with other governments and assisted to become financially self-sufficient; and

(b) pursue independently and swiftly those aspects of self-government that are not dependent upon land base considerations, although it will be appropriate for part of these negotiations to take place in the context of negotiations concerning the nation's land base.

—Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, "Métis Perspectives," in *Volume 4: Perspectives and Realities*, 4.
<https://data2.archives.ca/e/e448/e011188230-04.pdf>.



Establishing the National Definition of Métis

The inclusion of Métis in the *Constitution Act, 1982* led to a clarification of the nature of Métis identity for the Métis Nation. For example, prior to the inclusion of Métis in Canada's Constitution, the MAA had allowed non-status Indians to become members and access their services. With formal federal recognition, they adjusted their criteria for membership to better meet the needs of Métis in Alberta.⁸⁶

After years of extensive consultations, discussions, and debates, the Governing Members of the Métis National Council unanimously adopted the National Definition for Citizenship within the Métis Nation at the MNC General Assembly in September 2002:

"Métis" means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation.

"Historic Métis Nation" means the Aboriginal people, then known as Métis or Half-breeds, who resided in the Historic Métis Nation homeland.

"Historic Métis Nation Homeland" means the area of land in west central North America used and occupied as the traditional territory of the Métis or Half-breeds as they were then known.

"Métis Nation" the Aboriginal people descended from the Historic Métis Nation, which is now comprised of all Métis Nation citizens and is one of the "aboriginal peoples of Canada" within the meaning of Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

"Distinct from other Aboriginal peoples" means distinct for cultural and nationhood purposes.

– Métis National Council, "National Definition of Métis and Acceptance Process: Consultation Document," 2, http://www.metisportals.ca/cons/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/national_defn_and_acceptance_process_february_2006_document.pdf.



Métis Emergence in Canadian Jurisprudence

The Métis Nation has won a series of monumental victories in Canadian jurisprudence since the 1980s. The explicit inclusion of the Métis in Canada's *Constitution Act, 1982* clarified the constitutional duty that the Government of Canada has in their relationship with the Métis Nation. This has been foundational to a series of judicial victories, Agreements, and Memoranda of Understanding. These have all contributed to the acknowledgement of the Métis Nation's self-government. An excellent resource providing a more in-depth analysis of Métis experiences in the Canadian Courts is Jean Teillet's *Métis Law in Canada*, available both physically and virtually.

R. v. Powley, 2003⁸⁷

In 1993, two Métis community members, Steve and Roddy Powley, were charged by Conservation Officers for "hunting moose without a license and unlawful possession of moose contrary to Ontario's *Game and Fish Act*." ⁸⁸

Both the Métis Nation of Ontario and the "Métis Nation Council, on behalf of the entire Métis Nation" supported the Powleys in their hunt for justice. ⁸⁹ The Powleys were ruled to have a "Métis right to hunt that is protected by s.35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*" at the first trial, but the Crown appealed the decision. In 2000, the appeal was dismissed by the Ontario Superior Court of Justice, and the Crown appealed again to the Ontario Court of Appeal. ⁹⁰ The "Court of Appeal unanimously upheld the earlier decisions and confirmed that the Powleys have an Aboriginal right to hunt as Métis" in 2001. ⁹¹ The Crown again appealed, bringing the case to the Supreme Court of Canada.



Figure 36. Steve Powley,
<https://www.metisnation.org/news/powley-day-2020/>.

On September 19, 2003, the Supreme Court of Canada, in a unanimous judgment, said that the Powleys, as members of the Sault Ste Marie Métis community, can exercise a Métis right to hunt that is protected by s. 35.

—Métis National Council, "Fulfilling Canada's Promise. Métis Rights. Recognized and Affirmed: *R v. Powley*: A Case Summary," ¹, https://www.metisnation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/r_v_powley_mncfulfillingcanadapromise.pdf.

Along with the SCC's affirmation of Métis as one of the "aboriginal peoples of Canada" in s.35, they stated that "the appropriate way to define Métis rights in s. 35 is to modify the test used to define the Aboriginal rights of Indians (the **Van der Peet test**)."⁹² The **Powley test** was established to "set out the test for establishing Métis harvesting rights protected by s. 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*."⁹³ The test has ten parts:⁹⁴

Ten Parts of the Powley Test:

1. Characterization of the Right
2. Identification of the Historic Rights Bearing Community
3. Identification of the Contemporary Rights Bearing Community
4. Verification of Membership in the Contemporary Métis Community
5. Identification of the Relevant Time
6. Was the Practice Integral to the Claimants Distinctive Culture

7. Continuity Between the Historic Practice and the Contemporary Right
8. Extinguishment
9. Infringement
10. Justification

— Métis Nation of Alberta, "Establishing a Métis Right—The Powley Test," <http://albertametis.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/powleytest.pdf>.



In addition to the Powley Test, the SCC gave directions to governments in Canada regarding Métis, which included the assertion that identifying Métis rights was an urgent priority. They were also directed to address the regulations that did not recognize and affirm Métis rights and "afford them a priority allocation equal to First Nations."⁹⁵ Finally, the court directed that there should be a combination of judicial settlement and negotiations that clearly "define the contours of Métis right to hunt."⁹⁶

In Powley, the Supreme Court of Canada made a point of stressing that the harvesting practices of the Métis were "a defining feature of their special relationship to the land."

—Jean Teillet, *Métis Law in Canada* (Vancouver: Pape Salter Teillet, 1999), 2–10.

The Powley decision marked a new day for the Métis Nation in Canada. The Supreme Court's decision was a respectful affirmation of what the Métis people have always believed and stood up for, and is as well as, an opportunity for Canada to begin fulfilling its substantive promise to the Métis.

—Métis Nation of Ontario, "The Powley Case," <https://www.metisnation.org/registry/the-powley-case/>.

Manitoba Metis Federation Inc. v. Canada (Attorney General), 2013⁹⁷

In 1870, when Canada decided that it would take over governance and ownership of Manitoba public lands, negotiators from Red River (representing 12, 000 residents, 10, 000 Métis) protested, demanding rights to land.

This took two forms: a provision to protect existing land holdings of the 3000 Métis adult land holders (s. 32); and a provision to give the 7000 Métis children a head start with a grant 1.4 million acres of land to Métis children (s. 31). On the basis of these promises, the Métis agreed to lay down their arms and enter into Confederation.

— Jean Teillet and Jason Madden, *Manitoba Métis Federation v. Canada (Attorney General): Understanding the Supreme Court Decision* (Vancouver: Pape Salter Teillet, 2013), 2.

In 1981, the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) launched a case seeking the declaration that "the lands they were promised in the Manitoba Act, 1870 were not provided in accordance with the Crown's **fiduciary** and honour of the Crown obligations."⁹⁸ As well, they sought a declaration that "certain legislation passed by the Manitoba Government that affected the implementation of the Manitoba Act was not within the jurisdiction of the province."⁹⁹

After twenty-six years of persistent litigation, the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench dismissed the action in 2007. Though the judge acknowledged that "there was lengthy delay in implementing the land provisions of

the Manitoba Act" due to government error and inaction, he held that only individuals could bring the claim, and thus that the MMF could not.¹⁰⁰ The MMF brought the case to the Manitoba Court of Appeal in 2010 but lost again on the same grounds, that the "MMF had no standing to bring the case."¹⁰¹

Finally, in 2013, justice arrived for the Métis Nation at the Supreme Court of Canada. The MMF's appeal was granted, and it was held that "the federal Crown failed to implement the land grant provision set out in s. 31 of the *Manitoba Act, 1870* in accordance with the honour of the Crown."¹⁰² In addition to this victory, the SCC granted the standing of the MMF, and gave them costs throughout.¹⁰³



This decision would assist in securing future negotiations with the federal government on a nation-to-nation basis to advance ongoing reconciliation with the Métis.

What is at issue is a constitutional grievance going back almost a century and a half. So long as the issue remains outstanding, the goal of reconciliation and constitutional harmony, recognized in s. 35 of the Charter and underlying s. 31 of the Manitoba Act, remains unachieved. The ongoing rift in the national fabric that s. 31 was adopted to cure remains unremedied. The unfinished business of reconciliation of the Métis people with Canadian sovereignty is a matter of national and constitutional import.

—MMF Case, para. 140. See Jean Teillet and Jason Madden, *Manitoba Métis Federation v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 11.

A New Direction – Advancing Aboriginal and Treaty Rights (The Eyford Report), 2015

In July 2014, the Honourable Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, mandated Douglas R. Eyford to engage with “representatives of Aboriginal communities and organizations, provincial and territorial governments, and stakeholders.”¹⁰⁴ Their goal was to discuss the renewal and reform of Canada’s comprehensive land claims policies.¹⁰⁵

Comprehensive land claim agreements are the modern equivalent of historic treaties. They are designed to resolve persisting claims of unextinguished Aboriginal rights to land. Since Canada began negotiating comprehensive land claims in 1973, negotiations have been lengthy and arduous due to sharp differences in beliefs and values between the parties.

A New Direction: Advancing Aboriginal and Treaty Rights (more commonly known as the “Eyford Report”) was released in 2015 to address these issues and provide recommendations.

The report includes a section on reconciling Métis rights. Eyford states that, despite the recognition of the Métis as one of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada in 1982, “Canada [has] failed to accept their status as an Aboriginal group with constitutionally protected rights.”¹⁰⁶ Two Métis-specific recommendations were reported:

Canada should develop a reconciliation process to support the exercise of Métis section 35(1) rights and to reconcile their interests.

Canada should establish a framework for negotiations with the Manitoba Metis Federation to respond to the Supreme Court of Canada’s decision in *Manitoba Metis Federation v. Canada*, 2013 SCC 14.

—Eyford, *A New Direction*, 45.

“Canada must do more in its relationship with the Métis to ensure their section 35 rights are appropriately recognized and can be meaningfully exercised.”

—Douglas R. Eyford, *A New Direction: Advancing Aboriginal and Treaty Rights*, (Gatineau: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2015), 44, https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-CIRNAC-RCAANC/DAM-TAG/STAGING/texte-text/eyford_newDirection-report_april2015_1427810490332_eng.pdf.



Daniels v. Canada (Indian Affairs and Northern Development), 2016¹⁰⁷

The Daniels Case is one of the monumental court victories leading to Métis **self-determination** in Canada. The Daniels decision was the culmination of the seventeen-year legal battle that began in 1999 with Harry Daniels. Daniels, president of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) at the time, and Leah Gardner, a non-status Anishinaabe woman from Ontario, went to court seeking three declarations.

"The Plaintiffs asked for three judicial declarations:

1. "that Métis and non-status Indians are in s. 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867;
2. "that the federal Crown owes a fiduciary duty to Métis and non-status Indians; and
3. "that Métis and non-status Indians have the right to be consulted and negotiated with, in good faith, by the federal government on a collective basis through representatives of their choice."

—Jason Madden, Nuri Frame, Zachary Davis, and Megan Strachan, *"Another Chapter in the Pursuit of Reconciliation and Redress . . .": A Summary of Daniels v. Canada at the Supreme Court of Canada* (Vancouver: Pape Salter Teillet, 2016), 1, [http://www.mmf.mb.ca/docs/Daniels/PST-LLP-Summary_Daniels-v-Canada_\(SCC\)_April-27-2016.pdf](http://www.mmf.mb.ca/docs/Daniels/PST-LLP-Summary_Daniels-v-Canada_(SCC)_April-27-2016.pdf).

The case took twelve years to go to trial. In the interim, Harry Daniels passed away. His son, Gabriel Daniels, as well as Terry Joudrey, a non-status Mi'kmaq man from Nova Scotia, were added to the case as plaintiffs. The Crown appealed this decision, but the court held their motion to add both Gabriel and Terry to the case, noting that "unless Gabriel Daniels is added as a Plaintiff, the Respondents fear that there will be no party withstanding to raise the issue of Métis status, an issue of great importance to an estimated 200,000 people." ¹⁰⁸

In order to achieve its expansionist goals, Canada needed to facilitate positive "relationships" with the large and diverse Aboriginal population it encountered. This included dealing with the Métis—as "Indians" under s. 91(24)—both prior to and post Confederation. As such, the Court issued a declaration that the Métis are included in s. 91(24).

On April 14, 2016, after years of litigation and funding challenges, the "Federal Court held that Métis and non-status Indians are 'Indians' within the meaning of s. (24) of the Constitution Act, 1867. The result is that all aboriginal individuals in Canada are now within federal jurisdiction." ¹⁰⁹

—Madden, Frame, Davis, and Strachan, *"Another Chapter in the Pursuit of Reconciliation and Redress,"* 3.

This reaffirmed the fiduciary relationship that the Crown has with Aboriginal peoples, including Métis and non-status Indians. ¹¹⁰ Until the Daniels Case, the federal government had argued that it could not legislate on matters regarding the Métis. Therefore, the 2016 ruling paved the way for new discussions, negotiations, and possible litigation with the federal government over land claims and access to education, health programs, and other government services. ¹¹¹



Figure 37. Representatives of the Métis Nation gather after the *R. v. Daniels* court victory. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



Harry Daniels

Métis leader, social activist, author, and actor Harry Daniels is remembered as one of Canada's most visible and charismatic modern Indigenous leaders. Daniels was born in 1940 and died in 2004 in his home in Regina Beach. Daniels spent over forty years fighting for the rights of Indigenous peoples on both a national and international level. Participating in politics across the Homeland, Daniels worked as the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Métis Society, Vice President of the Métis Association of Alberta, Secretary-Treasurer for the Native Council of Canada (NCC), Commissioner of the Métis and Non-Status Indian Constitutional Review Commission of the NCC, and President of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples.



Figure 38. Harry Daniels. Photo courtesy of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

"We were negotiating land, our land. And that conservative, MacDonald, he wanted a railroad. Nothing has changed in 107 years. We're still negotiating for the same land."

—Harry Daniels, quoted in "Road Allowance People" (1992), courtesy of Half-Breed Inc., as shared in "Harry Daniels: A Metis Man for the People" MNCinfo, YouTube, 0:25–0:39, <https://youtu.be/PSxrySVcuOA>.

A Matter of National and Constitutional Import: Report of the Minister's Special Representative on Reconciliation with Métis (The Isaac Report), 2016

In June 2015, the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, appointed Thomas Isaac as the Ministerial Special Representative on the Reconciliation with Métis.¹¹² Isaac was mandated to provide clarity on Métis rights under s.35(2) of the Constitution and the *Manitoba Metis Federation* decision.¹¹³ The report was published on June 14, 2016. It built upon the 2013 Supreme Court Ruling of the *Manitoba Métis Federation Inc. v. Canada* case, which found that the Government of Canada had failed to follow through on the promise of land it made to the Métis in 1870.¹¹⁴

There is a need for reconciliation between the Crown, federal and provincial, and Métis peoples. This need represents not a challenge but an appreciable opportunity for Canada, and provincial and territorial governments, to reconcile with Métis peoples and to re-calibrate their relationships with Métis, recognize and celebrate Métis rights and culture within the context of Canada's larger history, and resolve outstanding Métis claims.

—Thomas Isaac, *A Matter of National and Constitutional Import: Report of the Minister's Special Representative on Reconciliation with Métis: Section 35 Métis Rights and the Manitoba Métis Federation Decision* (Gatineau: Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2016), 3, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/aanc-inac/R5-123-2016-eng.pdf.



A Matter of National and Constitutional Import (more commonly known as the “Isaac Report”) was issued in 2016 after a period of active engagement between Métis governments, organizations, institutions, and individuals. Isaac acknowledges that the Métis have largely been “forgotten until recent years in the national narrative as a distinct rights-bearing Aboriginal peoples.”¹¹⁵

The report issued seventeen recommendations, a few of which are highlighted below. The full list of recommendations is available online in *A Matter of National and Constitutional Import: Report of the Minister's Special Representative on Reconciliation with Métis*.¹¹⁶

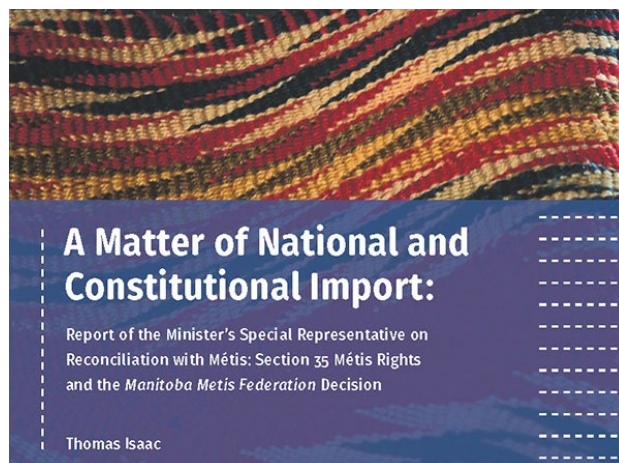


Figure 39. Cover of Thomas Isaac's *A Matter of National and Constitutional Import*. Photo courtesy of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

A Few Highlights from the Isaac Report:

- 1) Canada immediately establish a program(s) to educate federal employees involved with Aboriginal-related matters about the history of Métis, Métis contributions to Canada, existing federal initiatives relating to Métis, Métis culture and traditions and Canadian law relating to Métis and their Section 35 rights.
- 3) Canada review its existing policies, programs and services dealing with, or available to, Aboriginal peoples, or any of them, to ensure that Métis peoples and Section 35 Métis rights, are expressly and distinctly considered and be cognizant that any new Aboriginal-related policies, programs and services consider and, where appropriate, address Métis and their Section 35 rights distinctly and equitably.
- 4) Canada ensure that INAC's Regional Offices have, as part of their mandate, responsibility for developing relationships with the appropriate Métis governments, institutions and organizations and provincial governments on Métis issues in their respective jurisdictions and ensure that INAC's Regional Offices are provided the necessary tools and accountabilities to play a meaningful role in Canada's development and implementation of a Section 35 Métis rights framework.
- 11) Canada pursue consultation agreements, similar to the agreement signed with MNO, with the other Governing Members of the MNC and the Métis Settlements General Council, and Métis not otherwise represented by these governments as may be appropriate, to promote greater certainty relating to consultation and further the goal of reconciliation.

—Isaac, *A Matter of National and Constitutional Import*, 43–45.



Canada Métis Nation Accord

From 2010 to 2020, there were tremendous movements towards the establishment of a nation-to-nation relationship between the Métis Nation and Canada. Many fundamental understandings about the Métis Nation were being acknowledged in Canadian courts and legislation. In the late 2010s, the Métis Nation and the federal government were meeting to review progress in social and economic policies, programs, governance, and reconciliation. The leaders identified new and ongoing priorities for the coming year, including child and family services, education, health, justice and policing, youth and sports, and the implementation of s.35(2) rights.¹¹⁷ On April 13, 2017, the Government of Canada signed an accord with the Métis Nation.

The Objectives of the Canada–Métis Nation Accord:

- 1.1 The Parties agree that it is in their common interest to establish a process for co-development and negotiation that will allow them to work together to:
 - 1.1.1 Uphold the special constitutional relationship that the Métis Nation has with the Crown as partners in Confederation and as recognized and affirmed in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982;
 - 1.1.2 Renew the Métis Nation-Crown relationship on a nation-to-nation, government-to-government basis;
 - 1.1.3 Advance reconciliation of the rights, claims, interests and aspirations of the Métis Nation and those of all Canadians;
 - 1.1.4 End the legacy of colonialism and colonial attitudes wherever they may remain in federal legislation, policies and practices;
 - 1.1.5 Improve socio-economic conditions of Métis and their access to social and economic programs and services that address their needs;
 - 1.1.6 Explore and support ways to address the historic and continuing impacts of unresolved claims and grievances of the Métis Nation; and
 - 1.1.7 Promote and advance the recognition of the Métis Nation and commemorate its role and that of its leader, Louis Riel, in Canada's western expansion.

–Métis National Council and the Government of Canada, *Canada–Métis Nation Accord*, <https://pm.gc.ca/en/canada-metis-nation-accord>.



Métis Nation in Alberta Today

1990s–Present

The successes of the Métis Nation in Alberta have accelerated in the last two decades. The impacts of the foundational constitutional and legal victories of the Métis Nation across the Homeland throughout the late 1900s and early 2000s are still unfolding. The Métis' dedication and commitment to justice are manifested in the many victories and resilient achievements that have taken place from 2000 to 2020.^a

In Alberta today, over 114,370 people have self-identified as Métis.¹¹⁸ Approximately 45,000 are registered citizens of the Métis Nation of Alberta.¹¹⁹ Approximately 6,500 people live on the Metis Settlements.¹²⁰ Métis live in almost every community in the province, celebrating their traditions, sharing their histories, and building the Métis Nation in many ways.

The Métis nation values self-reliance, self-sufficiency and individual and collective rights and freedoms. The Métis nation possesses the right of self-determination, including the inherent right of Métis governance which may be expressed and implemented by its members at the local, regional, provincial/territorial and national levels.

—Adopted in the Métis Homeland by the Métis National Council, July 28, 1994. Bylaws of the Métis Nation of Alberta Association, March 10, 2006, 1. <http://www.metisportals.ca/cons/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/mna-bylaws1.pdf>

Metis Settlements General Council

Those living on the Metis Settlements continue to be governed by the central authority of the MSGC established in 1990. It serves as the representative body addressing the needs and interests of all Settlement members. The MSGC works towards protecting the lands under the *Metis Settlements Accord, 1990* and providing the means for the preservation and enhancement of Métis culture and identity.¹²¹

MSGC is the central governing authority of the Metis Settlements. The General Council Assembly is comprised of all eight Settlement councils. Each Council has five members, including the chairperson. The four Executive Officers of MSGC are the President, Vice President, Treasurer and Elected Secretary. They are ex officio non-voting members of the Assembly and are elected to a three year term by the Councils.

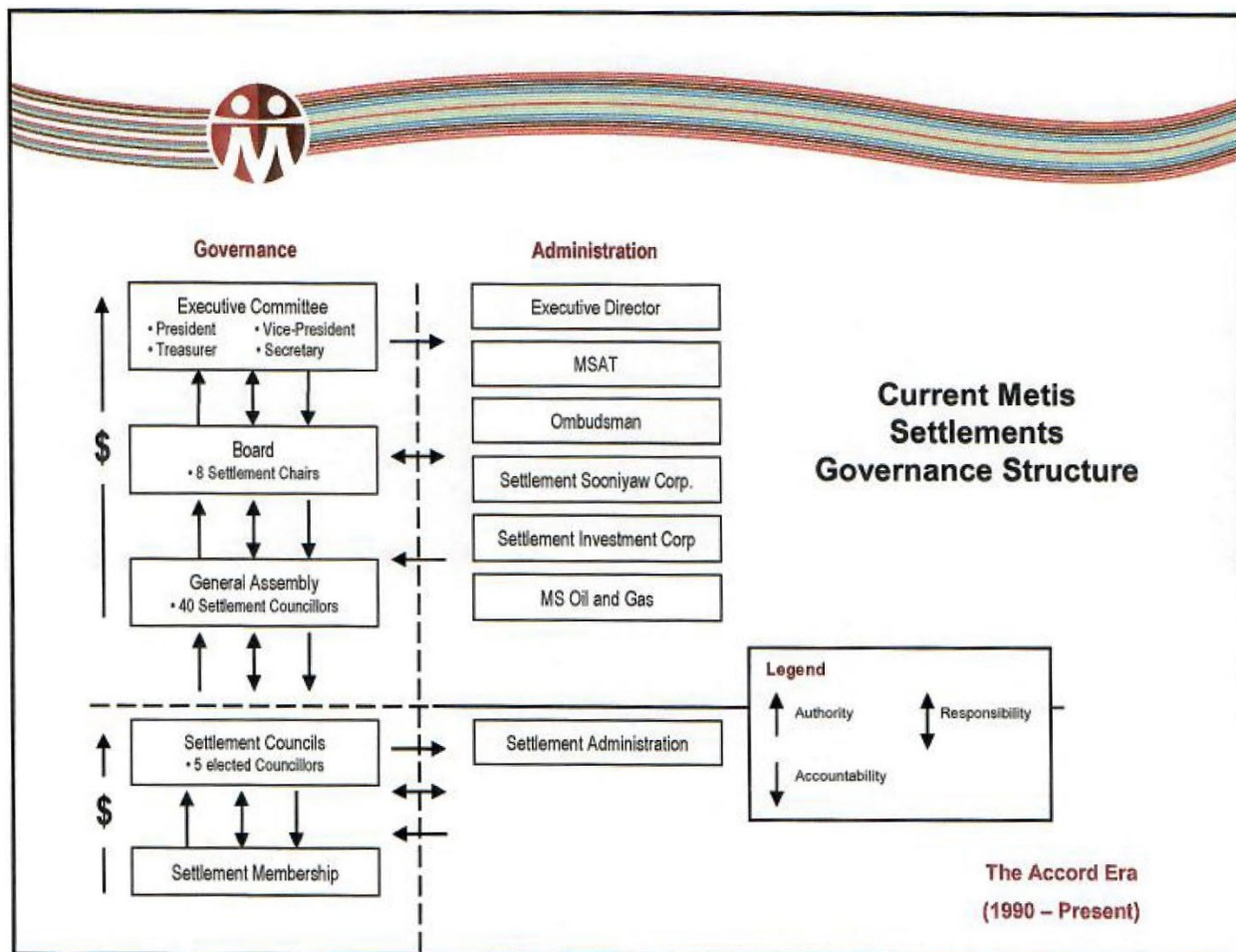
The MSGC Board of Directors is comprised of the eight Settlement chairpersons and the four MSGC Executives, who also sit on the Board as ex officio non-voting members.

—Metis Settlements General Council, “About Us,” <https://msgc.ca/about-us/>.

^a The content of this theme reflects Métis governance structures as of March 31, 2021 as decided collectively with the Theme Review Group members.



The MSGC's policies are "binding on the MSGC."¹²² They are developed "in consultation with the Minister of Indigenous Relations, have the same effect as Alberta law and are published in the Alberta Gazette."¹²³



The key modern building blocks of Metis Settlement governance include the Metis Settlements Appeals Tribunal, the Metis Settlements Land Registry, the Metis Settlements **Ombudsman**, and Metis Settlements Children Services.¹²⁴

To learn more about the operation and services provided through the governance of the MSGC, educators are encouraged to access the resources they have provided about life and governance. Additional information about life on the Metis Settlements is provided in the *Métis in Alberta* Foundational Knowledge theme.

Figure 40. Current Metis Settlements Governance Structure. Photo courtesy of then-President Gerald Cunningham, "Metis Governance," 7.



Figure 41. Gerald Cunningham, then-President of the Metis Settlements General Council, and Indigenous Relations Minister Richard Feehan celebrate the settlements' 80th anniversary, <https://www.albertanativenews.com/alberta-joins-the-metis-settlements-in-celebrating-their-80th-anniversary/>.



Métis Nation of Alberta

Citizens of the Métis Nation have achieved several accomplishments for the betterment of the people throughout the early 2000s.

These accomplishments include the **repatriation** of lands to the Nation for the care and use of Métis. In 2000, St. Margaret's Church was repatriated by the Nation. Just one year later, in 2001, the lands that would become Métis Crossing were also repatriated by the Nation.

Leaders from the MNA worked with the MNC as the national definition of Métis was established. The approval of this definition by Métis in Alberta at the 2003 **Annual General Assembly** was a critical step in unfolding the impacts of the 2003 R. v. Powley case.



Figure 42. Métis Nation of Alberta logo. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Governance Structure of the MNA

In the 1960s, the MNA was registered with the Province of Alberta under the *Alberta Societies Act*.

The MNA is one of three founding governing members of the MNC. The diagram below illustrates the MNC governance structure as of March 31, 2021.



Figure 43. Métis National Council Governance Structure. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



The governing structures of the MNA includes the **Annual Assembly** (more commonly referred to as the “Annual General Assembly,” or “AGA”), Provincial Council, Regional Councils, Local Councils, Elders’ Council, and Judiciary Council.

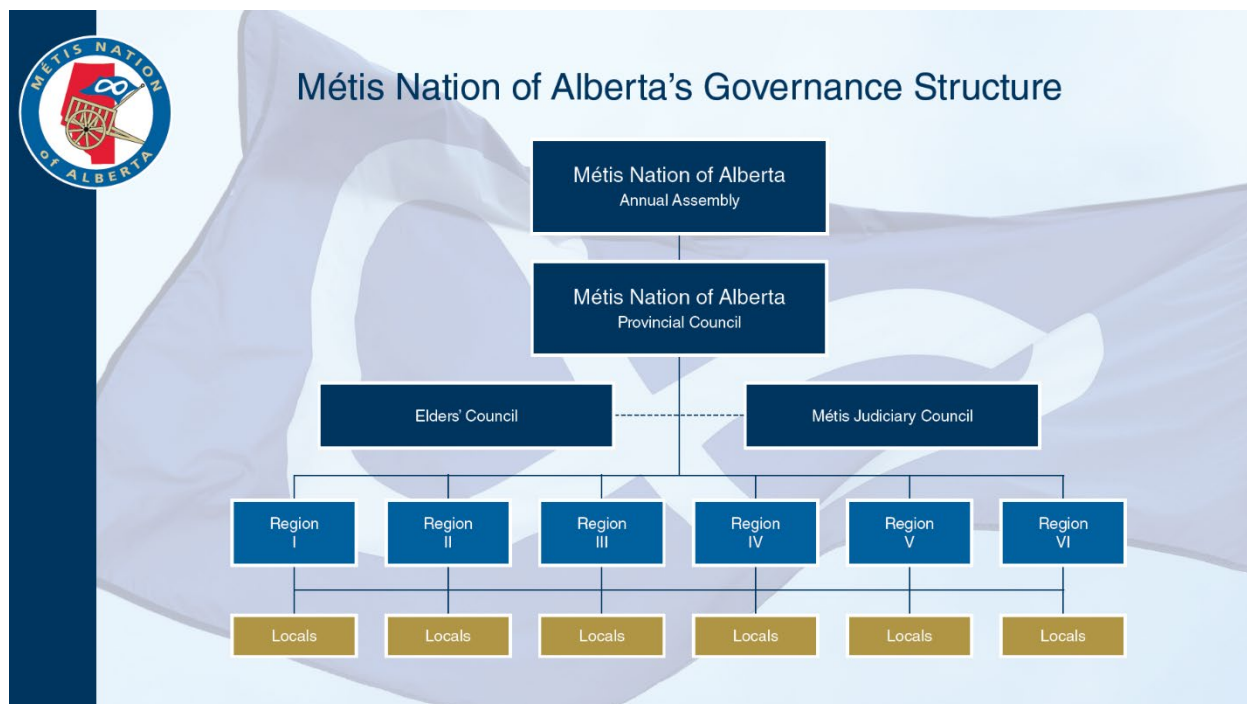


Figure 44. Métis Nation of Alberta Governance Structure. Courtesy of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Annual Assembly

The Annual Assembly, more commonly known as the “**Annual General Assembly**,” is the yearly gathering of the members (citizens)^b and leaders of the MNA. Métis travel from around the province to gather, alternating between Métis Crossing and one of the six regions, to build the Nation through various decisions, report on the progress of the Nation's goals, and celebrate the achievements of the year. Both citizens of the Nation and leaders propose and vote on resolutions. The decisions made by the Métis Nation citizens during the AGA guide the work of the MNA leadership.



Figure 45. Citizens voting at the AGA. Photo courtesy of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

The Assembly is the core of Métis Nation governance as it is the key opportunity for citizens of the Nation to debate changes to the bylaws as well as provide direction to the leadership of the nation going forward. The AGA is also an important tool in maintaining culture and identity of the Métis Nation as citizens from across the province are able to meet annually to celebrate Métis culture, heritage and community.

—Métis Nation of Alberta, “Bylaws,” <https://albertametis.com/governance/bylaws/>.

^b In the current bylaws, “member” and “citizen,” mean the same things as “membership” and “citizenship.”



Provincial Council

The MNA is governed by the Provincial Council (PC). The PC oversees “the affairs of the Métis Nation, including but not limited to cultural, economic, education, political and social affairs, as well as approving budgetary requirements and providing financial accountability to the Annual Assembly.”¹²⁵

There are Election Bylaws that govern the election of the MNA's President, Vice-President, and Regional representatives of the PC. The elected officials serve a four-year term. At the end of their term, unless their rights have been suspended, they are eligible for re-election once their term has been served.¹²⁶

Audrey Poitras

Audrey Poitras is a Métis woman with family roots in the Fishing Lake Metis Settlement and Elk Point, AB. As an entrepreneur with a strong financial background, she has been elected as the President of Métis Nation since 1996. Under her leadership, the MNA has established credibility and accountability, and has become a model of success in the pursuit of Métis social, political, and economic interests in Alberta. She works diligently to strive for the vision of Métis leaders both past and present, including the signing of a Métis self-government agreement with the Government of Canada.



Figure 46. Audrey Poitras. Photo courtesy of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Bylaws

The bylaws of the MNA direct the structure of the governance and role of the Métis government. They define the process of accountability to its citizens at the Annual General Assembly. These bylaws “continue the process of self-determination and self-government of the Métis Nation.”¹²⁷

The MNA bylaws reflect the spirit of democracy embodied by the forefathers of the Nation and evidenced by the articles of the Provisional Government established in 1869 in response to the sale of the Métis Homeland to Canada by the Hudson's Bay Company, just one instance of the exercise of Métis sovereignty in Canadian history.

– Métis Nation of Alberta, “Bylaws of the Métis Nation of Alberta Association,” <http://albertametis.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Metis-Nation-of-Alberta-Bylaws-Consolidated-Updated-September-17-2019.pdf>.

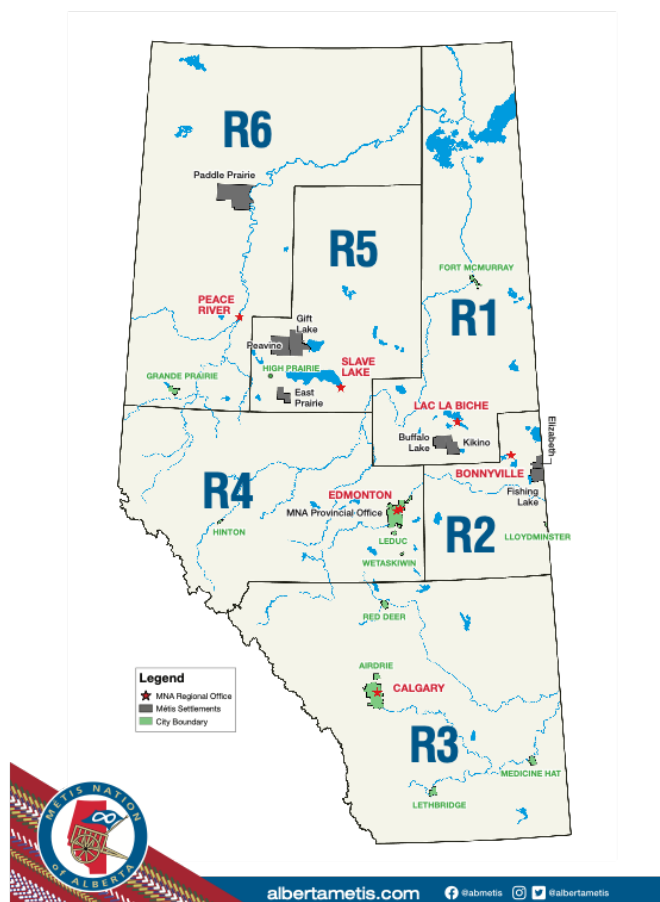


Regions

There are six regions across the province that represent thousands of Métis. Below is a list of the locations of Regional offices:

Provincial Office – Edmonton
Region 1 – Lac La Biche
Region 2 – Bonnyville
Region 3 – Calgary
Region 4 – Edmonton
Region 5 – Slave Lake
Region 6 – Peace River

Figure 47. Métis Nation of Alberta Region Map. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



Locals

Within each of the six regions, there are several community Locals. The Local communities elect their Local Council, including a President. The President of the Local Council brings community issues forward to their Regional Council. The Regional President and Vice-President are responsible for carrying forward the concerns to the PC.¹²⁸

Locals represent both a community-level government structure and an opportunity for community gatherings. Many Locals host events, gatherings, and celebrations, such as annual Christmas parties.



They also act as a voice representing and advocating for Métis families and individuals living within the vicinity.

Figure 48. Métis Local 87, Calgary gathering, 2019,
<https://www.facebook.com/MetisLocal87/photos/3013888565312766>.



2004–2007 Interim Métis Harvesting Agreement

The 2003 *R. v. Powley* victory in the Supreme Court of Canada was the catalyst for the Government of Alberta and the MNA to sign the Interim Métis Harvesting Agreement in 2004. This agreement affirmed that members of the MNA had the right to harvest throughout the province. In 2007, without any consultation with the MNA, the Government of Alberta arbitrarily cancelled the Agreement, then proceeded to impose the “[Sustainable Resource Development] Métis Harvesting Policy” that, among other arbitrary restrictions, exclude[d] Métis harvesting rights in central and southern Alberta.”¹²⁹

AGREEMENT

The Interim Métis Harvesting Agreement between the Government of Alberta and the MNA was meant to affirm the Aboriginal right of Métis to harvest in Alberta. The Province of Alberta broke this agreement and imposed restrictions on harvesting instead.

Following this unexpected decision, the MNA Annual General Assembly voted to reject Alberta’s unilateral Métis harvesting policy. In response, the MNA created a four-part Métis harvesting rights action plan:¹³⁰

The Hunt for Justice

- 1) to exercise the Métis Nation's rights by organizing hunts;
- 2) to defend Métis rights by challenging charges brought against Métis harvesters in court;
- 3) to undertake political action;
- 4) to educate the public.

–Métis Nation of Alberta, “Timeline,” <http://www.albertametisgov.com/timeline/>

R. v. Hirsekorn, 2013¹³¹

As part of the “Action Plan to assert the Métis right to hunt in Alberta,” Métis hunter Garry Hirsekorn shot a mule deer in the Cypress Hills area in 2007.¹³² He was charged and convicted under Alberta’s *Wildlife Act* for hunting wildlife outside an open season and being in possession of wildlife without a valid wildlife permit.¹³³ Hirsekorn defended the charges against him on the grounds that, as a Métis person within the meaning of s.35(2) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, he had an Aboriginal right to hunt for food.¹³⁴ He also asserted that the Government of Alberta’s *Wildlife Act, 1997* unjustifiably infringed upon that right.¹³⁵

The trial judge dismissed the constitutional challenge and convicted Hirsekorn, stating that “no rights-bearing Métis community exists or has ever existed in southern Alberta.”¹³⁶ The trial judge did, however, acknowledge the existence of a historical Métis community in central Alberta that “included the settlements of Fort Edmonton, St. Albert, Lac St. Anne, Victoria, Lac La Biche, and Rocky Mountain House.”¹³⁷

When Hirsekorn's appeal was heard at the Court of Queen's Bench of 2011, the appeal judge ultimately “upheld the trial judge’s finding of fact that...the Métis had insufficient evidence of hunting in Blackfoot territory.”¹³⁸



In 2013, the Court of Appeal “generally upheld the trial judge’s decision that Métis have no right to hunt in the Cypress Hills” on the grounds that there was no evidence of an established Métis community in the area prior to 1874, when effective European control was established by the arrival of the North-West Mounted Police.¹³⁹

Hirse Korn applied to have the case brought to the Supreme Court of Canada, but he was dismissed, “rendering the Court of Appeal’s decision the last word on the issue.”¹⁴⁰

Though the court chose not to recognize that “Métis people moved across borders and that the entire northwest was part of the Métis nation homeland,” the recognition of **historic Métis communities** in north and central Alberta was a victory.¹⁴¹ The Court of Appeal also recognized that “the historical rights bearing communities of the plains Métis are best considered as regional in nature, as opposed to settlement-based.”¹⁴²

In protest against this decision, the Métis community has been resilient in pursuing the hunt for justice as set out in 2004. Both *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin* remain inherent ways of being.



Figure 49. Métis in Alberta contributed support for Mr. Hirsekorn, including offering financial support to cover the hunting fine he faced. Photo courtesy of Shari Narine, “Alberta Court Ruling Major Blow to Métis Harvesting Rights,” AMMSA.com 28 no. 10 (2011), <https://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/alberta-court-ruling-major-blow-m%C3%A9tis-harvesting-rights>.

“Our forefathers fought for every step of the way to get the recognition that we deserve and we will continue to fight. There's no doubt about it.”

—Audrey Poitras, MNA President, quoted in Narine, “Alberta Court Ruling Major Blow to Métis Harvesting Rights.”

Growing the Métis Nation in Alberta

During the early 2000s, celebrated achievements were won that marked the efforts of Métis in Alberta to become a self-determining and self-governing people. It is by caring for the unique needs of their communities that many Métis have been challenging systemic discrimination and displacement. These self-determining movements have also led to a re-learning and re-engagement with their culture, as resilient leaders challenge assimilative narratives that have been told for generations.

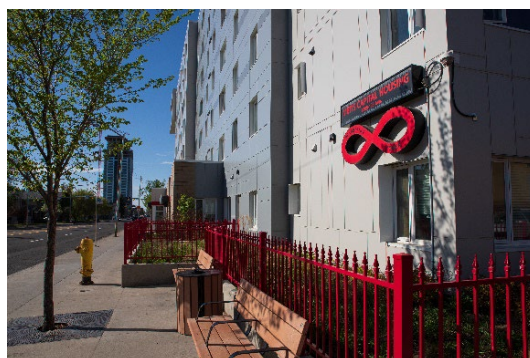
2005 – The lands of Métis Crossing open to visitors

2007 – Métis Capital Housing incorporated

2007 – The lands of Tail Creek repatriated to the Métis Nation

2010 – Rupertsland Institute established

Figure 50. A Métis Capital Housing building. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.





Reinforcing Citizenship in the Métis Nation

In the early years, members of the Métis Association of Alberta were issued membership cards. The purpose of these cards was to identify Métis as members and thus ensure access to services and verify that those participating in voting at political activities were Métis. Another foundational step that the Métis Nation of Alberta took during those years was a re-examination of the granting of membership/citizenship cards.



Figure 52. The 2006 MNA Provincial Council receiving the first new MNA citizenship cards to be issued. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Alberta v. Cunningham

In 1988, the Cunningham family, residents of Peavine Metis Settlement, opted to register as **Status Indians** to obtain medical benefits under the Indian Act.¹⁴³ However, the *Metis Settlements Act* states that “voluntary registration under the *Indian Act* precludes membership in a Métis settlement.”¹⁴⁴ The Cunninghams’ membership under the *Metis Settlements Act* was ultimately revoked.¹⁴⁵

In 2011, the Supreme Court of Canada dismissed the Cunningham family’s appeal. The SCC held that “[t]he right of the Métis to their own non-Indian culture is confirmed by the Constitution Act, 1982, s. 35.”¹⁴⁶ The positive outcome of this case was the recognition on a national level that the Métis are in fact a distinct people. This case is an important reflection of the distinction of the Métis community from the other Indigenous groups named in the *Constitution Act* of Canada.



Figure 51. Mary Wells's MNA membership card. Photo courtesy of Marilyn Lizee.

In 2006, the Métis Nation of Alberta issued new citizenship cards, as it strengthened its process based on the requirements of the National Definition of Métis for Citizenship within the Métis Nation. These citizenship cards verify that the holder is Métis and is recognized under s.35(2) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. At the 2013 MNA Annual General Assembly, a resolution was passed to cancel the old membership cards, called “red and white cards,” as they did not align with the National Definition of Métis for Citizenship within the Métis Nation.

The Métis have a right to their own culture and drawing distinctions on this basis reflects the Constitution and serves the legitimate expectations of the Métis people. The exclusion corresponds to the historic and social distinction between the Métis and Indians and respects the role of the Métis in defining themselves as a people.

– *Alberta (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development) v. Cunningham*, Supreme Court Judgements, Supreme Court of Canada, <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/7952/index.do>.



Recognition of Métis Nation Self-Government in Alberta

The accomplishments of Métis jurisprudence in Canadian courts have been foundational for much of the work that Métis in Alberta have accomplished to have their self-government initiatives recognized. The consecutive declarations, agreements, and initiatives that took place throughout the late 2010s were the realization of the historic fight for self-government.

Métis in Alberta Determine a New Objective: Negotiating a Modern-Day Treaty

During the 2016 MNA Annual Assembly, a Special Resolution was passed to amend the MNA bylaws to include negotiating a modern-day treaty as an MNA objective. A modern-day treaty relationship with the Crown “recognizes the MNA’s unique self-government, respects Métis rights throughout Alberta and addresses outstanding Métis land claims.”¹⁴⁷ Other objectives include the right of the MNA to “promote, pursue, and defend the Aboriginal, legal, constitutional, and other rights of Métis in Alberta.”¹⁴⁸

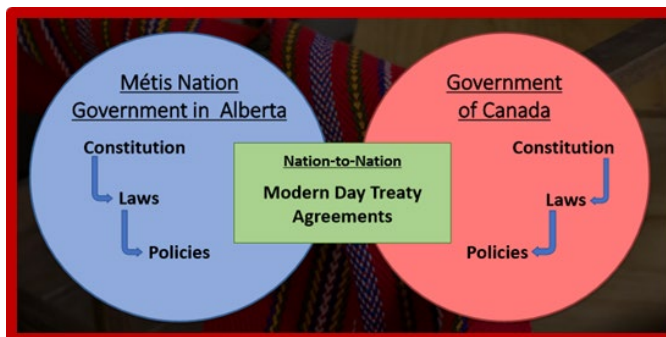


Figure 53. Zachary Davis, “A Métis Nation Constitution in Alberta: Self-Government Engagement Session,” (presentation, Métis Nation of Alberta’s Engagement Conference on Self-Government, Edmonton, AB, May 26, 2018).

An additional Special Resolution was also passed to adopt a new Oath of Membership. The goal of the new Oath was to provide clarity regarding the MNA’s mandate to advance Métis rights and claims on behalf of Métis in Alberta.¹⁴⁹ The new Oath of Membership requires all new applicants to affirm:

I agree to the Métis Nation's Bylaws and policies, as amended from time to time, and, voluntarily authorize the Métis Nation to assert and advance collectively-held Métis rights, interests, and claims on behalf of myself, my community and the Métis in Alberta, including negotiating and arriving at agreements that advance, determine, recognize, and respect Métis rights. In signing this oath, I also recognize that I have the right to end this authorization, at any time, by terminating my membership within the Métis Nation.

—Métis Nation of Alberta, *Bylaws of the Métis Nation of Alberta Association*, p. 71,
<https://albertametis.com/app/uploads/2021/06/MNA-Bylaws-Complete-Updated-Sept-17-2019.pdf>.

Specifically, these two Special Resolutions amended the MNA bylaws to add the following objective for the MNA: “to negotiate on behalf of the Métis in Alberta, a modern-day treaty relationship with the Crown through a ‘land claims agreement’ or other arrangement as called for and contemplated within the meaning of section 35(3) of the Constitution Act, 1982.”¹⁵⁰



Canada and MNA Sign the Memorandum of Understanding on Advancing Reconciliation

Following a series of negotiations throughout the fall and winter of 2016, the Government of Canada and the Métis Nation of Alberta signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** in January 2017.^c This allowed these two governments to begin formal negotiations towards shared and balanced solutions that would advance reconciliation and enhance the well-being of citizens of the Métis Nation of Alberta.¹⁵¹

"This MOU opens the door for us to finally put in place the government-to-government relationship with Canada our people have sought for generations as well as begin to address the pressing issues of our citizens and communities in Alberta, including dealing with Métis rights, lands and self-government."

—Audrey Poitras, President of the Métis Nation of Alberta, quoted in Métis Nation of Alberta, "Métis Nation of Alberta and Canada Sign Agreement to Advance Métis Rights and Outstanding Claims in Alberta," *newswire.ca*, January 31, 2017, <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/metis-nation-of-alberta-and-canada-sign-agreement-to-advance-metis-rights-and-outstanding-claims-in-alberta-612265763.html>.



Figure 54. Signing the Memorandum of Understanding on Advancing Reconciliation, Parliament Hill, January 30, 2017. Photo courtesy of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

^c A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is an agreement between two or more parties outlined in a formal document. It is not legally binding; however, it is an agreement on the willingness of the parties to move forward with a contract. The MOU can be seen as the starting point for negotiations, as it defines their scope and purpose.



Renewing the Métis Nation of Alberta–Government of Alberta Framework Agreement

Just as they had been leading self-determining initiatives at the federal level, the MNA was advocating for the recognition of Métis rights within the Province of Alberta. On February 1, 2017, the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Government of Alberta signed a renewed **Framework Agreement**. This was the first ten-year agreement between the parties. As an important step towards reconciliation, the Framework Agreement affirms the MNA's right to participate and collaborate with the Government of Alberta on decisions that will affect the well-being of its citizens.¹⁵²

AGREEMENT

The *Métis Nation of Alberta–Government of Alberta Framework Agreement* was a formal recognition that the MNA plays a representative role on behalf of its citizens. The agreement includes a commitment by the Province to address rights related issues such as Métis harvesting and consultation.

Priority Actions Included:

- Renewing and strengthening the nation-to-nation relationship
- Facilitating the recognition and respect of Métis Rights in Alberta that upholds the Honour of the Crown and advances reconciliation
- Develop a "whole of government" approach to Métis issues
- Increase economic opportunities for Alberta Métis in areas like environment, climate change, harvesting, health and wellness, housing, education, culture and heritage, employment, and women's issues.

– Métis Nation of Alberta, "Recent Agreements with Canada & Alberta," <http://albertametis.com/metis-rights/recent-agreements-canada-alberta/>.

Métis Nation of Alberta–Government of Canada Framework Agreement for Advancing Reconciliation

In less than a year, the federal commitments of the MOU were realized in the signing of a Framework Agreement for the MNA and the Crown. On November 16, 2017, the MNA and the Government of Canada signed the Framework Agreement for Advancing Reconciliation. This signing enabled the Métis Nation of Alberta and federal government to begin formal, nation-to-nation discussions towards shared and balanced solutions advancing reconciliation and the enhancement of the well-being of the citizens of the MNA.¹⁵³ It also established shared objectives and identified key topics to address, including Métis self-government, lands, rights, and consultation protocol.¹⁵⁴

AGREEMENT

The *Métis Nation of Alberta–Government of Canada Framework Agreement for Advancing Reconciliation* established the commitment to establishing a nation-to-nation, reconciled relationship between the Métis Nation and Canada.



Figure 55. The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, and Audrey Poirtras, President of the MNA, sign the Framework Agreement for Advancing Reconciliation, November 16, 2017. Photo courtesy of the Métis Nation of Alberta.



Advancing the Métis Nation

While these important federal and provincial agreements and commitments were being negotiated and applied, the Métis Nation won a few key victories in 2018. On behalf of the Métis governments they represent, the MNC signed the *Métis Nation Skills and Employment Accord* and the *Métis National Housing Accord* with Canada. These agreements helped enhance the skills, employment, and housing services that the MNA offers to its citizens.

The MNA also signed the *Indigenous Peoples Open Doors Program* with Parks Canada in 2018, enabling Métis to freely access lands that are currently recognized as national parks and historic sites in Alberta.

In 2019, the Government of Alberta signed a harvesting agreement with the MNA. This agreement recognized the rights of eligible MNA citizens to “hunt, fish, and trap for food in 4 regional harvesting areas in central and northern Alberta.”¹⁵⁵ Additionally, this agreement recognized the MNA’s authority to identify eligible Métis harvesters, and declared Alberta’s commitment to future negotiations “recognizing Métis harvesting rights in southern Alberta.”¹⁵⁶



Figure 56. Métis Nation of Alberta leaders at the signing of the Indigenous Peoples Open Doors Program, 2018. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.

Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement

After generations of struggle, resilience, and perseverance, the MNA signed the “first ever self-government agreement between the Government of Canada and a Métis government.”¹⁵⁷

On June 27, 2019, the MNA and the Government of Canada signed the *Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement* (MGRSA). The Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) and Métis Nation–Saskatchewan (MNS) also signed an Agreement at this time. This formally recognized that the Métis Nation, represented at the provincial level in Alberta, Ontario, and Saskatchewan, hold the inherent right to self-government.

AGREEMENT

The *Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement* (MGRSA) is the formal establishment of a nation-to-nation government-to-government relationship between the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Government of Canada.

"By signing these historic agreements today, our government is taking a fundamental step to advance reconciliation and transform our relationships with the Métis Nation of Alberta, the Métis Nation of Ontario and the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan. We are committed to advancing self-determination as we strengthen our government-to-government relationships."

– The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, M.D., P.C., M.P., Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations. News release, June 27, 2019 – Ottawa, ON – Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, <https://www.canada.ca/en/crown-indigenous-relations-northern-affairs/news/2019/06/historic-self-government-agreements-signed-with-the-metis-nation-of-alberta-the-metis-nation-of-ontario-and-the-metis-nation-saskatchewan.html>



The agreement clearly defined a process for implementing an agreement that will recognize Métis jurisdiction and law-making power in core self-government areas such as citizenship, leadership selection, and governmental operations. It also sets out a process for the negotiation and recognition of additional powers (such as language, culture and heritage, education, housing, and the environment).¹⁵⁸

Next Steps Towards a "modern, fully recognized Métis Government:"

- Ratification of a constitution by the MNA's citizens
- Ratification of the Self-Government Agreement by the MNA's citizens
- Negotiation of a fiscal agreement, intergovernmental relations agreement, and transition plan by Canada and the MNA
- Adoption by the MNA of the core laws the new Métis Government will need to function
- Adoption of legislation by Canada to implement the Self-Government Agreement

– Métis Nation of Alberta, "Self-Government: Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement FAQ," <http://albertametis.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/MNA-MGRSA-FAQ-DOCUMENT-V7.pdf>.

In 2019, the work of building a constitution for the Métis Nation within Alberta began with the appointment of the *Métis Nation of Alberta Constitution Commission*. The Commission, consisting of five citizens, was tasked with "drafting a Constitution for the MNA based on past and present citizen feedback, engaging with citizens on the draft Constitution, and overseeing the ratification process of the Constitution and the MGRSA."¹⁵⁹

"Now the hard work begins. Our citizens have called for our government to have a constitution for generations. Now we can build a constitution for the Métis by the Métis. This will require a province-wide ratification by our citizens. That is self-determination in action. Our citizens will have the power to make the decisions that matter most to them."

–Dan Cardinal, Vice President of the Métis Nation of Alberta, personal correspondence with RCTL, March 10, 2021.



Figure 57. The signing of The Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement. Photo courtesy of *Métis Voyageur* no. 102 (August 2019): 9, https://www.metisnation.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/mv102-a-final1_compressed.pdf.



Tri-Council Meeting January 14–16, 2020

The signing of the landmark agreements towards self-government was the catalyst for the meeting of the Métis governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario to advance reconciliation, self-governance, and community well-being for their respective citizens.



Collectively, these three Métis governments represent over 200, 000 rights-bearing Métis citizens living across the Homeland. They signed a joint declaration setting out their commitment to continued cooperation and shared priorities.¹⁶⁰

Figure 58. MN-S President Glen McCallum, MNA President Audrey Poitras, and MNO President Margaret Froh at the Tri-Council meeting in Edmonton. Photo courtesy of Rupertsland Institute.

“When we make efforts to work together, it brings a future with secure benefits for all Métis citizens. This gathering of Métis governments has been another step in realizing the dreams of our people and reinforces the importance of self-governance and self-determination.”

—Glen McCallum, President of the Métis Nation–Saskatchewan, quoted in *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, “Tri-Council Métis Nation Meeting Furthers Self-Government Collaboration,” January 17, 2020, <https://paherald.sk.ca/2020/01/17/tri-council-metis-nation-meeting-furthers-self-government-collaboration/>.

Otipemisiwak A National Conference on Métis Self-Government March 9–10, 2020.

The MNA, MNO, and MN-S came together on March 9–10, 2020, to host the first National Conference dedicated to conversations about Métis self-government in Canada, “Otipemisiwak: A National Conference on Métis Self-Government.” The conference drew upon the insights of both Indigenous and Canadian government leaders who have walked a similar road towards reconciliation.¹⁶¹ Voices of Métis youth were also featured, as the conference aimed to look towards the road ahead, stating that they were “guided by working in the best interests of Métis families, communities, and our future generations.”¹⁶²



Figure 59. Youth Leadership Panel at the Otipemisiwak Conference, 2020. Photo courtesy of Métis Nation of Alberta.



Recognition for Métis Nation Self-Government: The Time Has Come



Figure 60. Métis Nation of Alberta, “Self-Government for the Métis Nation of Alberta,”
<http://www.albertametisgov.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Constitution-One-Pager.pdf>.

The MNA is strategizing the movement toward the establishment of self-government for the Métis. This strategy requires a nation-to-nation relationship with Canada, as illustrated in the diagram.

When students interact with the story of Métis governance, it is essential that they understand the nation-to-nation relationship that Métis communities are moving toward. This relationship embodies the values of *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin* for Métis communities.

It is also important that students be equipped with the understanding that they are an important part of leading the nation-to-nation relationship process. This is the relationship that all students in Alberta (Métis and non-Métis) will be leading in the future.

Self-determination and self-government are inherent rights of all Indigenous people. Prior to Canada's westward expansion into the Métis Nation Homeland, we governed ourselves, and had done so for generations. Together, we called ourselves a nation—the Métis Nation—but Canada's colonial policies and institutions denied our nationhood, uprooted us from our lands, and restricted many practices at the core of our Métis culture. The MNA has fought for decades to have our right to self-government recognized and respected. The [Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement] gives us the legal means to regain control over matters directly affecting us and ensure Métis culture flourishes for generations.

– Métis Nation of Alberta, “Self-Government: Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement FAQ.”



Conclusion

Throughout the four eras of Métis governance, *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin* have been the pillars of Métis identity in their communities. Learning about Métis Nation governance is about learning not only of the evolving framework that Métis are establishing for themselves but also the successes that have been built on generations of resilient self-determination. Jason Madden describes it this way:

If you don't understand how we got here, and what our story is as the Métis Nation, you don't understand why this next stage or period in our history is so important. I think people need to understand the struggle and . . . the journey . . . [T]his is a continuation of the struggles that began in 1816, in 1869 and 70, in 1885, and continues to this day. We may not be picking up guns or doing armed resistance anymore, in fact, for the last 15 years we've been in the courts fighting for recognition and making sure that our inherent right of self-government and self-determination is recognized. What's really important now is the work that the Métis in Alberta need to do . . . to achieve the vision that Riel and leaders over the generations have had for the Métis.

— Jason Madden, “MNA Advancing Métis Nation Self Government in Alberta,” Métis Nation of Alberta Youth and Seniors Symposium, January 20, 2018, posted February 28, 2018, YouTube video, 0:26, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ZX7THp11Kw>.



Figure 61. The Métis Nation's infinity flag flies at Batoche, SK, today, in memory of those who gave their lives for the Nation. Photo courtesy of Rupertsland Institute.



Becoming the Métis Nation throughout the fur trade and buffalo hunts allowed for the establishment of *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin* at the foundation of the community. Establishing a provisional government in 1869–70 was the key step in formalizing a governance structure for the Métis, under which a Métis List of Rights was put forward. The provisional government of 1885 and the Revolutionary Bill of Rights acted as a continuation of the established worldviews of *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin*.

The enduring strength of the Métis was revealed through some of the hardest years of displacement and survival and allowed for governance to regain purpose as Métis structured themselves again in the early 1900s. The new strength became a determination for self-government done the Métis way: independent and unified, in accordance with *otipemisiwak* and *wahkohtowin*. The Métis governance systems in Alberta act as a vehicle that continues to empower Métis across the province.

Figure 62. Métis stand ready to lead a parade with the flags of the MNA, the MSGC, and Canada. Photo courtesy of the Métis Nation of Alberta.



The common Canadian narrative consists of stories of power, conquest, and **manifest destiny**. This one-sided version of history fails to acknowledge the ongoing, nation-to-nation relationships between the government and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. Continuing to spread this flawed narrative dismisses and dishonours the fundamental role that Indigenous communities played in the foundation of Canada today. It is only through the voices of these communities that we can move past this version of history together. The following comments of Métis scholar Adam Gaudry challenge the commonly told Canadian narrative and initiate a conversation regarding a Métis worldview:

Canadians also have much to learn about their historical relations with the Métis people, not only about Métis struggle against Canadian imperialism, but also the definitive Métis vision of a different type of relationship—based in a treaty agreement to co-exist and live together without trying to dominate one another. By learning this history, both Métis and [Canadians] can work together to realize another way of living together, and living side-by-side, in peace.

—Gaudry, “*Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk*,” 15.

Educators from all backgrounds share the responsibility to listen to the narrative that the Métis tell about their own governance and utilize that story to engage their students in the process of reconciliation. By engaging with Métis’ telling of their own governance, educators can learn about their country’s historical relations with the Métis people and the current vision of their Métis neighbours.



Figure 63. Métis Nation flag. Photo courtesy of Rupertsland Institute.



Notes

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- ¹ Robert K. Thomas, "Afterward," in *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, eds. Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1985), 245.
- ² Métis Nation of Alberta, "Background," <http://www.albertamétisgov.com/background/>.
- ³ World Health Organization, "Displaced People," https://www.who.int/environmental_health_emergencies/displaced_people/en/.
- ⁴ Alberta Teachers' Association, "A Note on Terminology," *Walking Together for Reconciliation*, 2. <https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/For%20Members/ProfessionalDevelopment/Walking%20Together/PD-WT-16a%20-%20Terminology.pdf>.
- ⁵ Métis National Council, "National Definition of Métis and Acceptance Process," http://www.metisportals.ca/cons/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/national_defn_and_acceptance_process_february_2006_document.pdf; Métis National Council, "Citizenship," <https://www2.metisnation.ca/about/citizenship/>.
- ⁶ Government of Canada, "Non-Status Indians," <https://www.fcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100014433/1535469348029>.
- ⁷ George Goulet and Terry Goulet, *The Metis: Memorable Events and Memorable Personalities* (Calgary: FabJob, 2008), 121.
- ⁸ Chris Andersen, *Métis: Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 110.
- ⁹ "Self-Government," Merriam-Webster.com, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-government>.
- ¹⁰ Métis Nation, *What We Heard: Report of the Métis Nation's Engagement with Métis Sixties Scoop Survivors* (Ottawa: Métis National Council, 2019), 14.
- ¹¹ Alberta Teachers' Association, "A Note on Terminology," *Walking Together for Reconciliation*.
- ¹² Renke, Wayne, and L.C. Green, "Treason," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/treason>.
- ¹³ Adam Gaudry, "Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk—'We are those who own ourselves': A Political History of Métis Self-Determination in the North-West, 1830–1870" (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2014), 77. <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/thesescanada/vol2/BVIV/TC-BVIV-5180.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Gaudry, "Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk," 112.
- ¹⁵ Louis Riel, *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel*, ed. George Stanley (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1985).
- ¹⁶ "Self-Government for the Métis Nation of Alberta," Métis Nation of Alberta, <http://www.albertametisgov.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Constitution-One-Pager.pdf>.
- ¹⁷ *Manitoba Metis Federation Inc. v Canada (Attorney General) et al.*, [2007], Manitoba Courts, Court of Queen's Bench 293, para. 661.
- ¹⁸ Gaudry, "Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk," 78, citing Diane Payment, *The Free People - Otipemisiwak, Batoche, Saskatchewan, 1870-1930* (National Historic Parks and Sites, 1990).
- ¹⁹ Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Métis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 3.
- ²⁰ Nicole St-Onge and Carolyn Podruchny, "Scuttling along a Spider's Web: Mobility and Kinship in Metis Ethnogenesis," in *Contours of a People: Metis Family, Mobility, and History*, eds. Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, and Brenda Macdougall (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 68.
- ²¹ Gaudry, "Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk," 74.
- ²² Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 6.
- ²³ Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 242.



- ²⁴ Alberta Education, "Teaching Quality Standard," *Government of Alberta*, 8, <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/4596e0e5-bcad-4e93-a1fb-dad8e2b800d6/resource/75e96af5-8fad-4807-b99a-f12e26d15d9f/download/edc-alberta-education-teaching-quality-standard-2018-01-17.pdf>.
- ²⁵ Gaudry, "Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk," 113.
- ²⁶ Jean Teillet, *The North-West Is Our Mother: The Story of Louis Riel's People, The Métis Nation* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2019), 99.
- ²⁷ Alexander Ross, *The Red River Settlement: Its Rise, Progress, and Present State* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1972), 245.
- ²⁸ Gaudry, "Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk," 76.
- ²⁹ Lawrence Barkwell, *The Battle of Seven Oaks: A Metis Perspective, Second Edition* (Winnipeg: Louis Riel Institute. 2015), <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/14172.NEW%20%20Battle%20of%20Seven%20Oaks%20final%202015%20oct%20second%20edition.pdf>.
- ³⁰ Teillet, *The North-West Is Our Mother*, 124.
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