

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

Discovering the Métis Nation in the Archival Records
of Library and Archives Canada

INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

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Who are the Métis ?

The Métis are descendants of European fur traders and Aboriginal peoples who emerged as a distinct group in the early 19th century. Due to their close ties to the fur trade, they were located along the fur trade routes. The first major Métis communities were located in the Red River area of Manitoba and spread to Saskatchewan and Alberta. The Métis also lived near the Great Lakes, Ontario, Quebec, NWT, Mackenzie river area, British Columbia, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Minnesota, and Washington.

Métis Families at the Crossing

Narcisse Marion:

Narcisse, brother of Roger and Maxime Marion, married Marie Gaudin Munro. They had eight children. In the mid 1880's, the family moved to the Poplar Ridge area, west of Red Deer where Narcisse worked as a hunter, trapper and guide. He was an accomplished fiddle player and like his father, a well known dancer of the Red River jig. Legend tells us that his father Narcisse Sr. 'jigged himself to death'.



Roderick McKenzie and family, Library and Archives Canada, A050862

Roderick McKenzie:

Roderick and Harriet (nee Cook) had settled at the Crossing when their son Colin was born in 1881. The land was not surveyed until 1883, so they took up squatters rights. The McKenzie brothers, Benjamin and Roderick, especially the outgoing and personable Roderick, were recorded in local newspapers and histories. They were farmers, ranchers and entrepreneurs. In 1883, they bought a sawmill and threshing machine. On September 15, 1883, the threshing machine put up two hundred tons of hay in a day and the mill was turning out very fine work with \$35/ 1,000 feet. By March 1885, the mill was cutting lumber nearly as fast as it could be hauled away. The McKenzie's were also ferry operators, freighters and land speculators.

Métis Identity?

Métis identity and nationhood are often closely associated but they have separate and distinct concepts. **Métis Identity** refers to the ways in which a person identifies as Métis, and the practices, beliefs and history that make up their personal experience. **Métis nationhood** is the result of specific historical events and the basis for political relationships certain Métis organizations share with the federal and provincial governments of Canada. There are currently five provincial and one national political organization that represent the interests of the Metis people.

**For more information on this topic see further readings below.

Jerry Potts

Jerry Potts, or Ky-yo-kosi meaning 'Bear Child' was a scout, guide and interpreter. He was born in Fort Mackenzie, Montana in 1840, and died at Fort MacLeod, AB, in 1896. Famous among the Blackfoot for being a great warrior and hunter. He was an interpreter with the signing of Treaty 7, and he was hired by the NWMP to help guide them during the whiskey trade. He is known for his ability to find his way even in a blizzard, and at maintaining friendly relations between the mounted police and the Blackfoot people.



Jerry Potts, Glenbow Archives, NA-1237-1

Henry Louis Norwest

Henry Louis Norwest, nicknamed 'Ducky' was Métis of Cree/French origins from Hobbema, Alberta. A former ranch hand and rodeo performer, he served with the Royal North West Mounted Police until 1915, then joined the 50th Canadian Infantry Battalion. He had a sniping record of 115 fatal shots, and earned a medal during the battle of Vimy Ridge. He showed great bravery and saved many lives as a skilled marksman. He died on Aug. 18, 1918 in France.



Sharpshooter: Henry Louis Norwest, Glenbow Archives, NA-1959-1

"Fay ton bon" = Be good in Michif language

Stories of local families



"Binvinu" = Welcome in Michif



ALLARD

Father: Gilles Allard, Mother: Dawna, children: Chaundra, Laura, Dan, Trevor and Allison.

For the Allard family, learning to jig was a way to foster pride and connect to Métis traditions. After arriving in Red Deer in 1991, they started a small dance troupe and taught jigging lessons. They were invited to dance at provincial and national celebrations.



ST. DENYS

Father: Harvey St. Denys, Mother: Mary Bramley, daughters Kay and Raye.

Harvey and Mary met in England during WW2. He was a Canadian soldier raised on a road allowance in Innisfail, AB. Mary came from a wealthy British family. Harvey brought his War Bride back to Canada where they made their first home in small shack on a narrow road allowance just outside of Caroline, AB.



LIZOTTE

Father: Donald Lizotte, Mother: Bertha Beaudry Lizotte, Children: Brian, Donna, Robert. Brian Lizotte married Orlean Chalifoux, daughters: Brianna and Leela.

Music runs through all sides of the Lizotte family. Originally from Fort Vermillion, the family moved to Red Deer in 1980. Bertha's and Don's father, uncles and cousins all played the fiddle. Bertha plays the guitar and accordion and Don the guitar. The musical tradition is being carried on with son Brian and granddaughters Brianna and Leela.



DUMONT-VANESS

Father: Ambrose Dumont, Mother: Mary Vaness, children: Isabelle, Marjorie, Herbert, Joseph, Bruce, Doreen, Alfred, Marie, Danny, Marilyn

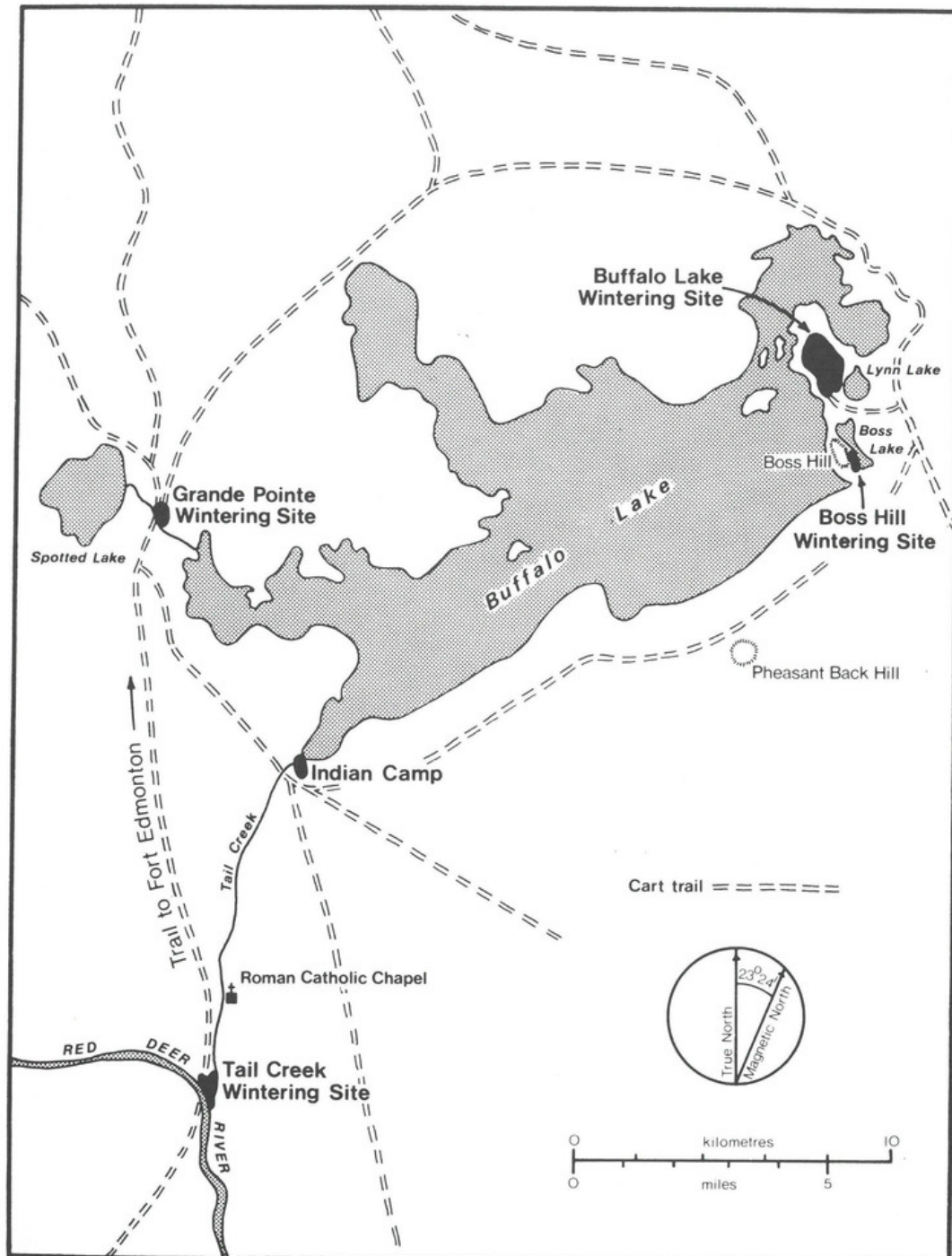
Ambrose and Mary (Vaness) Dumont raised their 10 children on a road allowance on Bergen Road near Sundre. They would throw big kitchen parties at the end of the work week.

"This is how you feed your family. We had bigger families. Set your snare on the way to school..."

Gilles Allard

Map of Buffalo Lake & Tail Creek Settlement

Buffalo Lake was the largest Métis settlement west of Winnipeg. At its peak in the 1870's it had approximately 1,500 - 2,000 people and over 200 dwellings. Today it is a farmers field. The Tail Creek settlement was in use from 1870-1878 until fire destroyed the town; it wiped out all the cabins but one. Today, the Tail Creek site is a cemetery and a campground at its location on Highway 21 north east of Red Deer.



Source: Doll, Maurice F.V., Kidd, Robert S., Day, John P.; *The Buffalo Lake Métis Site: A Late Nineteenth Century Settlement in the Parkland of Central Alberta*, pg. 261.

"We are the last frontier of the mixed blood". Gilles Allard

MATCHING GAME



BEADS

Find the beaded flower designs in the textiles on display



BEAD WORK

vest, MAG collection

Floral designs often began as a large central flower from which an endless variety of vines, buds, berries, leaves and flowers were organized in a symmetrical design. Métis beadwork is often identified by the number of different coloured beads found on a garment. *How many colours can you count on this vest?*



BEAD WORK

Gauntlets, belong to Mary Desjarlais

Careful stitching tells us that Métis women respected their materials and took pride in their work. Some beads are so tiny that a needle cannot pass through them. Beads were threaded directly onto sinew and then a needle was threaded onto the sinew to sew.

MÉTIS SASHES

Find these Métis Sashes on display.



Finger twined Sash



Machine woven Sash

Meaning of the sash colours:

Red: is for the blood of the Métis that was shed through the years fighting for our rights

Blue: is for the depth of our spirits.

Green: is for the fertility of a great nation.

White: is for our connection to the earth and our creator.

Yellow: is for the prospect of prosperity.

Black: is for the dark period of the suppression and dispossession of Métis, land.

"We embraced the culture because they showed up!". Gilles Allard



Did you know?....

Culture and Clothing



CAPOTE

Wool blanket coat, MAG collection

Capote is a hooded coat the Métis men wore. It was made from a Hudson's Bay Company Point Blanket. They were fastened together with a Métis sash. The bottoms of the coats were made wider to allow for greater leg movement.



FIDDLE

Also known as the violin: musical instrument of the Metis.

Photo credit: Orlean Lizotte

The Scottish and French Canadian traders brought lightweight fiddles to Western Canada during the fur trade era. Métis musicians began playing their own tunes – a mix of First Nations, Scots and French Canadian rhythms. They became good fiddle players and dancers.



FINGER WEAVING

Wool yarn is used for finger woven sashes.

Finger weaving was the technique used to weave a 'ceinture fléchée' sash. All you need for finger weaving is yarn, two short dowels and your fingers.



JIGGING

A dance played to fiddle music. Photo credit: MAG

Métis jigging originated in the Red River area. It is a combination of First Nations step dancing and Scottish and French-Canadian reel, jig and quadrille steps. Popular jigs: Red River jig, Rabbit dance and the Sash dance.

MÉTIS SASH

Métis Sash, woven wool -belt

Also known as 'ceinture fléchée' or arrowhead sash, had many uses for the voyageur. It was used as a support belt, a tumpline (a sling used around the chest or forehead to support a pack carried on a back), an emergency rope, and sometimes used as a cup.



"Dans la jig" = dance the jig in Michif language

GLOSSARY



Did you know?.....

Transportation and Lifestyle



CARIOLE

Winter sled for travelling over snow.

French Canadian, light open sleigh pulled by dogs or horses.



MÉTIS SETTLEMENT

Lands were set aside for Métis settlement associations which form a constitutionally protected Métis land base in Canada.



PORTAGE

To carry their canoes on their backs.

Voyageurs were often Métis boatmen. They traveled the rivers in birch bark canoes or York boats to hunt for the fur trade companies.



ROAD ALLOWANCE

Lands surveyed and reserved by the government of Canada for future road development. Following the rebellion, parcels of land were inhabited by Métis families located on the fringes of reservations and settlements.



RED RIVER CART

Metis main source of inland transportation

From the 1820's-1880's Red River Carts were used for buffalo hunting and freighting goods. The wheels came off the cart and attached underside so the cart could float across the water like a raft.



YORK BOAT

Large boats used to haul freight along the river systems.

Boats were the main means of inland transportation in early settlement in Canada. The York boat was heavier and sturdier than the canoe and could haul more goods in one trip. HBC employees built the boats to haul furs, passengers and trade goods.

"Bonn Shans" = Good luck in Michif language

GLOSSARY



Did you know?..

Metis History



LA GALET/ BANNOCK

Michif for Bannock

La Galet is Michif for bannock. Métis bannock has its origins in Scottish bannock. First Nations and Métis adapted the dish here in Canada.



GATHERING BAGS

Beaded Bags for berry picking

Métis were hunters and gatherers. They would gather plants and berries and store them in gathering bags, often decorated with beadwork. Artifact from Michif Cultural Centre, St. Albert, AB.



MICHIF

Cree and French language combined

The Métis are speakers of many languages. In Alberta, Michif speakers can speak a combination of English, French, Cree, Ojibway and other First Nations languages.



TUPPEE

Tapis - French for dog blanket. Blankets are worn by the dogs.

Dog sleds were a vital form of transportation during the fur trade. Voyageurs had two or three dogs to pull the sled or cariole. Artifact from Michif Cultural Connections in St. Albert, AB..



SCRIP

A substitute for legal tender, a form of credit or currency.

The basic premise of scrip was to extinguish Métis rights to the land. This was done by awarding a certificate redeemable for land or money. The choice of the applicant was for 160 or 240 acres of land dependent on their age or status. First Nations lands fall under treaties.



VOYAGEUR

Also known as 'courier du bois' (French for runner in the woods)

Voyageurs transported furs and goods to and from the fur trading companies. Often they traveled by canoe or on foot.

"Marsee"= Thank you in Michif language

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