

# Métis

## Overview

- The constitution of Canada recognizes the Métis as one of three Aboriginal Peoples.
  - Métis were originally the offspring of male European fur traders (primarily Scottish or French) and First Nations females, mainly Cree and Ojibway.
  - Developing their own distinct culture and language, the Métis played key roles in the fur trade economy along the trade routes between the Rockies and the Great Lakes.
  - Métis communities can be traced back to the 1700s.
  - According to the 2006 census almost 400,000 people identified themselves as Métis in Canada.
  - Métis were declared a distinct people with distinct rights on September 23, 2003, in a ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada, which outlines three broad identifying factors to Métis rights-holders: self-identification as a Métis individual; an ancestral connection to a historic Métis community; and acceptance by a Métis community.
- population began to swell, a new Aboriginal language and culture emerged.
  - Better trading relationships stemmed from this bridging of the cultural gap.
  - Because of their knowledge of the land and their experience as voyageurs, buffalo hunters and interpreters, the Métis were invaluable to fur-trading companies.
  - In the late 18th century, a strong Métis community was established in what today is southern Manitoba.
  - In 1816, under the leadership of Cuthbert Grant, the Métis defeated the Selkirk settlers at the Battle of Seven Oaks and unfurled the flag of the Métis Nation.
  - The Hudson's Bay Company abandoned its claim to the Red River area in 1869, selling its rights to the Dominion of Canada. Under Louis Riel, the Métis formed a provisional government to secure the rights of the Métis Nation. A year later Riel's government negotiated the terms of the Manitoba Act with Sir John A. Macdonald and Manitoba became a province in the Dominion.

## History of the Métis

- First Nations men taught the explorers and fur traders how to live in the woods during the North American fur trade in the 18th and 19th centuries. French, Scottish and English fur traders at the time met First Nations women and raised families with them.
  - Additional unions between male European fur traders and First Nations women occurred when trading posts were established across Rupert's Land by the Hudson Bay Company and the North West Company.
  - While some of these fur traders left their new wives and children behind, many of them would stay and look after their wives and children. At first, the children were not considered to be a distinct ethnic or racial group.
  - These children were typically exposed to both the Aboriginal and European (primarily Catholic) belief systems. As marriages began to flourish and the
- A land grant for the Métis majority in the new province was provided for The Manitoba Act, but the Canadian government did not honour its commitment.
  - Most Métis had to abandon Manitoba, the province they'd help create, when hostile settlers arrived from Ontario.
  - In the Saskatchewan Valley in 1885, the failure of the federal government to address the land rights of the Métis led to the Northwest Resistance conflict and the establishment of the second Métis provisional government under Riel's leadership.
  - The Métis were defeated at the Battle of Batoche, and Louis Riel was then tried for treason, found guilty and executed by hanging.

## Geography

- Métis communities were established in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories, primarily along major fur trade routes and waterways.

## Food

- The early Métis diet came from hunting and fishing, and included buffalo, deer, moose, elk, prairie chickens, rabbits, ducks, geese and fish.
- Berries, when available, were also a staple of the Métis diet.
- A concentrated mix of fat and protein made of dried, crushed meat called pemmican was a nutritious item packed on hunting trips.
- A bread called bannock, consisting of flour, melted lard, baking powder, salt and water was also made by Métis.

## Shelter

- The most common Métis dwellings were log houses; basic square structures made out of rounded logs with notched ends. The homes were heated with iron stoves or mud ovens, but extra insulation for the winter came from covering their homes with a layer of mud. The floors were sometimes made of wood, but more often than not, were merely dirt.
- Métis villages and smaller communities typically had roughly 40-50 log cabins, which were usually built in a circle around the largest building. This large building was the setting for dancing and gatherings.
- The Métis tended to camp in tipis or canvas tents while on buffalo hunts and trade expeditions.

## Transportation

For transportation, the Métis relied on the Red River cart, York boat and canoe.

- The Red River cart had two large wheels and was able to traverse rough terrain.
- The York boat was a boat for inland waterways, and was used to carry furs and trade goods.
- The Métis birch bark canoes were similar to those of the First Nations.

## Clothing

The clothing of the Métis people was a combination of both First Nations and European styles.

- The Métis men typically wore moccasins, a short shirt, red woolen cap, deerskin pants, a “capot” (long hooded coat) and a colourful sash around their waist, which could be used as a rope, bandage, washcloth or towel. The colour of the sash had a special meaning: blue and white represented the Métis nation’s flag, red represented the hunting flag; black was reminder of their struggle for rights; and green represented growth and prosperity.
- The Métis women tended to wear simple dresses with high necklines, shawls over their heads and moccasins on their feet.
- Often referred to as the “flower beadwork people,” the clothing of the Métis was often decorated with floral beadwork, which they introduced and is something that continues to be a part of Métis culture today.

## Language

- Michif is the Metis language, a mixture of French, English, Cree and Ojibway languages.
- Bungee is a former Métis language that is now extinct. This language was similar to Michif with some Gaelic words.

## Groups

- Cree or Ojibway women were typically the maternal forebearers of the Métis.
- French or Scottish fur traders were typically the paternal forebearers of the Métis.
- At one time, there was a distinction between French Métis born of francophone voyageur fathers and Anglo (English-speaking) Métis born of Scottish fathers. However, today these two cultures have joined together.

## Métis Today

- Louis Riel is now recognized as a founder of the Province of Manitoba, and many Canadians consider him to be a hero.

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- The Métis Nation's national and international representative is the Métis National Council.