

Stepping Stones



ALBERTA MÉTIS SETTLEMENTS AND AGREEMENTS

Planning your learning journey

Who are the Métis and how did there come to be Métis settlements in Alberta?



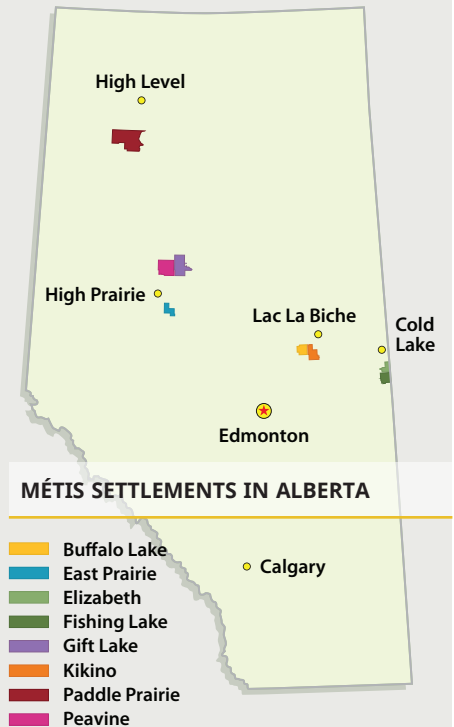
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L'Association founders – Pictured from left to right: Malcolm Norris, Jim Brady, Peter Tomkins, Joseph Dion and Felix Calliou.

FIRST STEPS



Métis communities and their distinct culture were established with the fur trade prior to the North-West Territories becoming part of Canada.¹ The Métis are one of the three distinct Aboriginal people of Canada recognized in the 1982 Canadian constitution. Many Canadians have mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry but do not self-identify as Métis. Métis in Alberta are Aboriginal people who are related by kinship to, but culturally distinct from, other Aboriginal people, possessing their own [Michif language](#)², customs, traditions and relationships to land.





EARLY NORTH-WEST TERRITORIES HISTORY



Historically, the Métis played a crucial role in the development and success of the fur trade throughout the North-West beginning as early as the 18th century.³ As European fur traders moved into the [North-West Territories](#)⁴ some entered into “country marriages” with Aboriginal women and had children with them. Alberta Métis communities that flourished as prominent fur trade locations include Fort Chipewyan (c. 1778), Fort Vermilion (c. 1779), Lac La Biche Mission (c. 1785) and Fort Augustus (Edmonton House) (c. 1795). A distinct Métis culture emerged in these early settlements. Following the Canadian westward expansion, the Métis in Alberta lost jobs and land and endured deplorable living conditions following the failed and fraudulent Métis scrip processes. These factors contributed to the 1885 Métis North-West Resistance.⁵



The Métis flag displays a white infinity symbol on either a blue or a red background. The infinity symbol represents the joining of two cultures and the existence of a people forever.

[Louis Riel](#)⁶, leader of the 1869 Métis Red River Resistance, joined forces with [Gabriel Dumont](#)⁷, president of the South Saskatchewan River Métis, to fight for Métis land rights in what is now Saskatchewan and Alberta in the North-West Resistance that culminated at [Batoche](#)⁸ in 1885. After a four-day battle, the better equipped Canadian militia defeated the Métis forces. Riel surrendered, was tried for treason by the Canadian government, and convicted and executed on November 16, 1885.⁹ Dumont escaped capture and fled to the United States. In 1886, the Canadian Government granted amnesty to Dumont, and he returned to live in Saskatchewan until his death in 1906. In 1992, the Canadian government recognized Louis Riel

as the founding father of Manitoba. Dumont remains a popular Métis folk hero, remembered for his selflessness and bravery during the 1885 Resistance and for his unrivaled skill as a Métis hunting chief.

ALBERTA HISTORY

Prior to Alberta joining confederation, the Métis were not welcome in white settlements nor allowed to live on treaty land. Legally the Métis did not have a land base like the First Nations or access to permanent homestead agreements as did the settlers. During this time, the Canadian government offered money and land scrip to the Métis as compensation for relinquishing [title](#)¹⁰ to any land due to them based on their First Nations’ ancestry. The Métis land scrip was seen as the least expensive way for the government to extinguish the Métis title.¹² Many who took the land scrip eventually sold their land, while others chose to join Indian bands in which they had relatives.¹¹ The Métis became landless and destitute as a result. During this period the Métis made their homes on road allowances, narrow strips of Crown land designated for future road development throughout Alberta. These homes were often burned and the road allowance land expropriated by the Crown. This is why the Métis were once called the “[road allowance people](#)”¹³ or nomadic half-breeds.

Father Lacombe, a Roman Catholic missionary in northern Alberta, became concerned for the well-being of the Métis and lobbied the Canadian government to establish a Métis colony and a school to assimilate the Métis. In 1896 the government set aside 92,160 acres of land on a 99-year lease to establish a colony east of the Saddle Lake Reserve at St Paul. Fifty Métis families moved into St Paul des Métis; however, in 1906 the federal government terminated the lease and opened the land to French-Canadian settlers.¹⁴ In spite of these setbacks, many contemporary Métis communities throughout Alberta, such as Fishing Lake, St Albert, Grouard, Gift Lake, St Paul and Carcajou can attribute their existence today to the early settlement efforts of [Métis](#)¹⁵ families.¹⁶

In 1932, the Métis in Alberta began to organize themselves politically. L’association des Métis d’Alberta et des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (later called the Métis Association of Alberta) was formed by Malcolm Norris, Jim Brady,



GLENBOW ARCHIVES NA-5127-2

Joe Dion at organizing meeting, Elizabeth Métis settlement, Alberta. (ca. 1939)

Peter Tomkins, Joseph Dion and Felix Calliou in response to the *Natural Resources Transfer Act, 1930*. The Association's purpose was to lobby the government for improved social and economic conditions and a land base for the Métis.¹⁷ These lobbying efforts led to the Alberta government forming the [Ewing Commission](#)¹⁸ in 1934 to investigate the living and economic conditions of Alberta Métis. One of the recommendations of the Ewing Commission final report was for the province to set aside land for the establishment of Métis colonies. In 1938, the Alberta government passed the [Métis Population Betterment Act](#)¹⁹ and Alberta become the first province in Canada to enact legislation specific to Métis and to designate land for 12 Métis settlements. The people of each settlement formed their own elected governing councils for self-determination over the Métis land.

Over the years, however, the Alberta government unilaterally closed four settlements, made changes to the legislation and misused the Métis Betterment Trust, prompting the eight remaining settlement councils to organize in response. In 1975, the Alberta Federation of Métis Settlement, today the Métis Settlements General Council, was legally formed and became a strong, united voice for the settlements to advance their collective interests.²⁰

In 1989, the Alberta government and the Federation signed the historic [Alberta-Métis Settlements Accord](#)²¹

establishing the Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC) and a new framework for working together. The following year, Alberta passed four pieces of legislation related to the Métis settlements, creating a governance framework for the eight remaining settlements and providing for comanagement of subsurface resources on settlements (*Métis Settlements Act*); protecting Métis settlement lands under the provincial constitution (*Métis Settlements Land Protection Act* and *Constitution of Alberta Amendment Act*); and providing a 17-year statutory funding commitment (*Métis Settlements Accord Implementation Act*). A total of 1.25 million acres of land was transferred to the Métis Settlements General Council, resulting in the only protected Métis land base in Canada.²²

TODAY'S MÉTIS

The 1982 Canadian constitution recognized the Métis as “Aboriginal people of Canada,” along with First Nations and Inuit, giving them Aboriginal rights under the constitution. Statistics Canada 2011 census data reported the self-identified Alberta Métis population as 96,870, which is the largest of any province in Canada. Approximately 8,000 live on the eight Métis settlements, with the remaining living throughout the province.²³ The [Métis Settlements General Council](#)²⁴, representing settlement members, and the [Métis Nation of Alberta](#)²⁵, representing nonsettlement Métis, are two provincial organizations working to advance the socio-economic and cultural well-being of the Métis people of Alberta. The [Rupertsland Institute Métis Centre of Excellence](#)²⁶, established in 2010, is a not-for-profit education, training and research institute that provides support for Métis K–12 education throughout the province. The Métis still struggle to gain recognition of their aboriginal rights and for reconciliation. Recently the Supreme Court ruled in *Daniels v Canada*, April 2016, that Métis and nonstatus Indians are “Indians” under section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*. This ruling clarifies that the federal government has primary responsibility for Métis. The full impact of the [Daniels v Canada](#)²⁷ has yet to be determined.



Métis Settlements of Alberta flag, representing the federation of eight metis settlements of Alberta, Canada's only Métis land base.

USED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE MÉTIS SETTLEMENTS GENERAL COUNCIL.

NEXT STEPS



The Métis are the largest group of self-identified Aboriginals in Canada and Alberta; therefore, it is likely the vast majority of schools in Alberta have students who self-identify as Métis. Reconciliation is about understanding the past and working together to build a new future. Having a knowledge of Alberta Métis history and current issues will support teachers as they work with these students and their families.

Continuing Your Learning Journey

- a) *What were the findings of the Ewing Commission that lead to the establishment of Métis Settlements?*
- b) *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action seek to eliminate the education gap for all Aboriginal peoples, including the Métis. How can classroom teachers support this call to action?*

NOTES

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17. *Making History. Our Land. Our Culture. Our Future*, 13.
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20. *Making History. Our Land. Our Culture. Our Future*, 13.
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Stepping Stones

Stepping Stones is a publication of the Alberta Teachers' Association **Walking Together Project** intended to support certificated teachers on their learning journey to meet the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Foundational Knowledge competency in the Teaching Quality Standard.

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For additional resources and information on Walking Together visit www.teachers.ab.ca.

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Walking Together

EDUCATION FOR RECONCILIATION



The Alberta Teachers' Association