

## **Brief History of the Métis**

*The following has been compiled using information from a variety of sources, including the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Metis Settlements General Council. It is offered for general information only and is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of the long and rich history of Métis people in Canada.*

The origin of the Métis people is a vital component of the historical fabric of Canada. Beginning in the mid-1600s, mixed-blood offspring of European fur traders and First Nation women were born and began to form a new Aboriginal identity, known as ‘Métis’ (from the Latin ‘miscere’, meaning “to mix”). This Métis identity developed a distinctive culture resulting from a combination of European and First Nation influences.

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Métis communities were established in the Red River basin, south of Lake Winnipeg, in the area that would become Manitoba. A unique Métis language, Michif, also arose, which is influenced by the geographical areas where Métis people reside. Métis communities also developed a unique, political and legal structure, with strong democratic traditions.

With mixed traditions and a command of both languages, Métis people became the logical intermediaries between the European and First Nation cultures, particularly in the fur trade. As a result, Métis villages, communities, and colonies arose in select locations across western Canada. Prior to, and immediately following, confederation, the Métis made a significant contribution to the development of western Canada. The Métis worked as guides, interpreters, and provisioners to the new forts and trading companies. One of the most well-known Métis leaders was Louis Riel, who played a critical role in the development of western Canada.

Métis people lived in Alberta prior to Alberta joining confederation. In 1928, the Métis began to organize themselves politically. The Métis associations that were formed were referred to by several names, including the Half-Breed Association, the Métis Association, and the Half-breed Association of Northern Alberta. In 1932, Malcolm Norris, Jim Brady, Peter Tomkins, Joseph Dion and Felix Calliou, organized L’Association des Métis d’Alberta et les Territoires du Nord-Ouest. Its purpose was to lobby for improved social and economic conditions, and a land base for Alberta Métis.

Responding to the problems of health, education and the general welfare of the Métis population, the Alberta Legislature passed a resolution to investigate the conditions of Alberta Métis. In 1934, the Ewing Commission, an Alberta Royal Commission, was established to fulfill this mandate. In 1936, the Ewing Commission tabled its final report and recommended the establishment of Métis colonies on lands held by the Crown for exclusive use of the Métis.

In 1938, acting on the recommendations of the Ewing Commission, Alberta passed the *Metis Population Betterment Act*, which set aside colonies for Métis people. In doing so, Alberta became the first province in Canada to enact legislation specific to Métis.

In 1975, the Alberta Federation of Metis Settlements Associations was formed, as the legal entity, to provide Settlement councils with a means of sharing information, coordinating efforts, and developing policies on matters requiring cooperation.

In 1987, Alberta and the Métis Nation of Alberta Association (MNAA) signed a Framework Agreement, the first in a series of Framework Agreements. The mandate of the Framework Agreement is: to promote and facilitate the advancement of Métis people by providing a framework for the parties to work cooperatively in partnership to develop and implement mutually acceptable methods of addressing the agreed needs and aspirations of Métis people, and to preserve their identity and cultural heritage.

In 1989, Alberta and the Alberta Federation of Metis Settlement Associations signed the historic Alberta-Metis Settlements Accord, a package of proposed legislation and agreements with various components for the constitutional protection of Settlement lands, the development of local government structures and systems, provincial financial commitments and the co-management of subsurface resources. The goals of the accord were a secure Métis land base, local autonomy, and economic self-sufficiency.

The following year, Alberta passed four laws related to the Metis Settlements which:

- provide a governance framework for the eight Metis Settlements;
- protect Metis Settlement lands under Alberta's provincial constitution;
- provided a 17-year statutory funding commitment; and
- provide for co-management of sub-surface resources on Settlements.

A total of 1.25 million acres of land was also transferred to the Metis Settlements General Council (MSGC) through letters patent. This is the only recognized Metis land base in Canada protected by legislation, including a provincial constitutional amendment. As of 2009 approximately 8,000 people reside on Alberta's Metis Settlements.

Today, Métis people in Alberta continue to work together, both on and off-Settlement. Alberta Métis continue to value their collective aspirations and political organizations, and maintain their relationship with the land and reliance on traditional harvesting practices.

Read more about the [Alberta's Metis Settlements legislation](#).