

USING THE TIMELINE

MÉTIS NATION HISTORY

The Métis are a distinct Indigenous people with their own history, culture, languages and territories, with deep historical roots in the three Prairie provinces and northwest Ontario, northeast British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, northern Montana and North Dakota.

YEAR	EVENT
1600s	The fur trade begins in what is now Atlantic and Central Canada with the emergence of European settlements.
1670	Hudson's Bay Company is established with a royal charter. During the late 18 th and early 19 th centuries, the Métis would become invaluable employees due to their skills as boatmen, bison hunters, labourers, traders and interpreters.
1750s	Mixed-heritage children in the Great Lakes region, including some in what is now Ontario, begin to identify as Métis and begin to intermarry, forming communities. They no longer see themselves as extensions of their maternal (First Nations) or paternal (Euro-Settler) relations. They are the children of Indigenous women and male employees and former employees without contract (freemen) of fur trade companies.
1759	The Battle of the Plains of Abraham establishes British control over Canada and other parts of New France, ending France's claim to its territory. With the revival of the Montreal-based fur trade in the 1770s, a distinction is made between the Métis, descended from French-Canadian voyageur fathers, and the Country Born, English Métis descended from English or Scottish fathers.
1811	Hudson's Bay Company grants Thomas Douglas (Lord Selkirk), a Scottish peer, a land grant of 300,438 square kilometres centred on the junction of the Red River and the Assiniboine River in the Red River Valley to bring in Scottish settlers. The Métis who already live in the area refuse to accept Lord Selkirk's control because they fear losing their lands and their ability to both trade and provide pemmican for the fur trade.
1812-1814	The War of 1812, primarily fought in the Great Lakes region, sets in place what becomes the Canada-United States border. The potential disruption to the Métis' culture and economic well-being by an American takeover, as well as their close relationship with First Nations (who were strategically allied with the British during the war) leads most Métis in the region (and some from what is now Western Canada) to fight on the British/Canadian side.
June 19, 1816	The Métis and their North West Company allies, led by Cuthbert Grant, defeat Hudson's Bay Company officials and Selkirk settlers at the Battle of la Grenouillère (or Seven Oaks). The battle lasts only 15 minutes and involves fewer than 80 men. Many of the Selkirk settlers leave the colony and do not return, but others would come back and settle permanently. The Hudson's Bay Company tries to curb the Métis' hunting and trading practices, including practices involving its rival, the North West Company (to which the Métis had close family and trading ties). The Métis fly the red Métis Infinity (Circle of Eight) flag, which was first flown in 1815. It is the oldest patriotic flag to have been created in Canada. The "Métis bard," Pierre Falcon, composes "The Battle of Flag Plain" or "la gournouillère" — the first Métis national anthem and the oldest patriotic song created in Canada.
1820s-1850s	Métis self-identity further crystallizes as hundreds of Red River Métis and Scots/Orkney "Half-breeds" begin working as free traders, fur trade boatmen, bison hunters and farmers. During this time, the Métis call themselves "gens libres," "Otipemisiwak" or the "Free People"

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because of their desire to be free. They are also known as “Apeetogosan,” “Wissakodewinimi,” “chicot,” and “Bois-brûlés” because of their mixed heritage. The two groups begin to intermarry and begin to see that they have common interests against Hudson’s Bay Company trading monopoly and governance.

- 1821** The merger of Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company results in an influx of Métis and Country Born families to the Red River Settlement.
- 1849** A Hudson’s Bay Company magistrate releases Métis trader Guillaume Sayer, after convicting him of trafficking in furs, because of the presence of many armed Métis horsemen outside the courthouse.
- 1851** The Métis win a decisive two-day battle against the Dakota at Grand Coteau, just outside of present-day Bismarck, N.D., on July 13 and 14. The Métis and the Dakota soon conclude a peace treaty, ensuring that the two Indigenous nations share bison stocks.
- 1857** English-Métis lawyer Alexander Isbister, while a resident in London, begins lobbying the British government to recognize the Métis’ and First Nations’ Indigenous rights in 1847. After 10 years of lobbying, Isbister presents his case against the monopoly of the Hudson’s Bay Company before the British Parliamentary Select Committee. It is decided that, following the precedent of the Royal Proclamation (1763), once Rupert’s Land becomes part of a larger British North-American union, the region’s Indigenous residents should have a formal treaty process with the Crown before Euro-Canadian/European settlement can occur.
- 1867** On July 1, the British North America Act is passed, creating the Dominion of Canada.
- 1869** The Red River Settlement, one of the largest settlements on the Plains, consists of an estimated 9,800 French Métis and English Métis and 1,600 Euro-Settlers.
- 1869** The Dominion of Canada purchases Rupert’s Land (the expansive land area that makes up the drainage basin of Hudson Bay) from Hudson’s Bay Company. Métis and First Nations living in the territory are not consulted. The French Métis and English Métis at the Red River Settlement establish the National Committee, effectively forming a provisional government. This action forces Canada to negotiate with the Métis to bring the region into Confederation as a province, which would become the “postage-stamp”-sized province of Manitoba in 1870. This event is known as the Red River Resistance.
- 1870-1875** Between August 1870 and March 1873, the “Reign of Terror” is conducted against the Métis by the Red River Expeditionary Force under the command of Garnet Wolseley. The force is sent west by the federal government to “pacify” the new province. Métis men are murdered and Métis women and girls are raped by the Canadian soldiers. In addition, many settlers begin to arrive from Ontario and are openly hostile to the Métis. Louis Riel, fearing for his life, flees to the United States. The appalling social climate in the new province forces the majority of the Métis to disperse to the South Branch Métis settlements around Batoche throughout the 1870s.

Louis Riel is elected three times to represent a Manitoba riding — once in a general election and twice in two by-elections held in October 1873, February 1874, and September 1874. He never takes his seat, fearing for his life.

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- 1870** On March 4, Thomas Scott, a violent Orangeman from Ontario and a surveyor employed by the federal government, is court-martialed by a Métis firing squad upon Louis Riel's approval. This action, the most-noted event of the Red River Resistance, would greatly contribute to Louis Riel's own execution in 1885.
- 1870** The Manitoba Act creates the province of Manitoba, Canada's fifth province, on July 15. The Métis, led by Louis Riel, ensure that the new province will protect French-language rights, making the new province bilingual. The act also contains a section (31) in which the "children of the half-breed heads of families" are to receive 1.4 million acres of land to be distributed when they reach the age of 21. Upon reaching the age of majority, Métis children are given scrip certificates indicating that they have to settle in the nearby North-West Territories (which now includes Alberta and Saskatchewan). No provisions are put in place to establish a consolidated Métis land base or to affirm the Métis' Indigenous hunting and harvesting rights.
- 1872** On Feb. 8, the Ontario government places a \$5,000 bounty on Louis Riel, who was then living in exile in the United States.
- 1872** The Saskatchewan valley Métis, under Gabriel Dumont's leadership, petition for an inalienable Métis colony of 1.8 million acres. This is one of dozens of petitions sent by the Métis during the 1870s and 1880s in what is now Alberta and Saskatchewan regarding their land tenure.
- 1875** In February, the Canadian government grants amnesty to all Métis (except Louis Riel and Ambroise Lépine) who participated in the 1869-70 Red River Resistance.
- The North-West Territories Act becomes law in April. There are no provisions for the Métis in this act, which affects Métis living in what is now Alberta, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, and northern Manitoba.
- In August, the North West Mounted Police force the Batoche-area Métis to abandon their form of local self-government, "le conseil de Saint-Laurent" or the "Council of St. Laurent." With Gabriel Dumont as its president, the council's last edict tries to enforce the Laws of St. Laurent conservation measures.
- On Sept. 12, the Métis at Rainy Lake and Rainy River (present-day Fort Frances) successfully negotiate a "Half-breed" adhesion to Treaty 3, which is originally signed by "Indians" in the Northwest Angle in 1873. This is the only time Métis are dealt with as a collective in one of the historic treaties. After signing, Canada fails to fulfill the adhesion terms by attempting to make Métis in the region identify as "Indians."
- 1875** In June, the federal government's Half-Breed scrip commissions begin to issue land and money scrip certificates to honour the land-provisioning promises of the Manitoba Act (Section 31). Instead of creating a large contiguous land base, the scrip certificates are issued individually in many different locations. The system is fraudulent, and most Métis do not end up living on their allotted scrip land.
- 1878** On Feb. 1, the Métis at St. Laurent (Batoche) prepare a list of grievances. In a letter to Lt.-Gov. David Laird, Gabriel Dumont asks for local schools to be subsidized by the territorial government, assistance for Métis farmers, the appointment of a French-speaking magistrate, a Métis member of the territorial governing council, and a land grant to extinguish the Métis' Indigenous title to the land.

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1879

On May 15, Parliament amends the Dominion Lands Act to allow for the granting of land to the Métis in the North-West Territories, as well as to parents who were not granted land in the original land grant allotted in the Manitoba Act. However, a commission to settle the Métis land grievances in the North-West Territories is only established on Jan. 28, 1885, and only begins to meet as the Battle of Duck Lake breaks out on March 26, 1885.

1881-1885

The Canadian government builds the Canadian Pacific Railway from Ontario to British Columbia, leading to an influx of new settlers to Western Canada and dramatically changing the economy and way of life of the Métis.

1884

Without a secured land base or title to their individual lands, Prairie Métis experience ever-increasing encroachment on their lands by new settlers.

1884

The French Métis and English Métis of the Northwest pass a resolution on May 6 to obtain Louis Riel's assistance to negotiate their outstanding land tenure grievances with the federal government.

1884

On June 4, James Isbister, Gabriel Dumont, Moïse Ouellette and Michel Dumas arrive at St. Peter's Mission in Montana to bring back Louis Riel to Canada.

1884

On Dec. 16, Louis Riel and William Henry Jackson (secretary to Riel) draft a petition listing the grievances of the Northwest's inhabitants. The government responds by appointing a committee to investigate Métis claims and to make a list of those who did not take scrip in Manitoba.

1885

On March 8, Louis Riel puts forth a motion for the formation of a provisional government and the drafting of a Bill of Rights.

On March 18, Louis Riel is informed that the Métis petitions would be met with bullets. Thus, the Métis immediately form a provisional government. Pierre Parenteau is chosen as president, Charles Nolin is commissioner, Gabriel Dumont is adjutant-general, French-Canadian Philippe Garnot is secretary, and 12 other Métis men are elected as members of the council. The non-Indigenous settlers and English-speaking Métis withdraw their support of the provisional government. The provisional government establishes its headquarters at the Saint Antoine de Padoue Church in Batoche.

The first battle of the 1885 North-West Resistance occurs at Duck Lake on March 26. The Métis, under the leadership of Gabriel Dumont, defeat a party of North West Field Force troops and settler volunteers.

On April 24, Métis forces under Gabriel Dumont clash with Gen. Middleton's army at Tourond's Coulee (Fish Creek). The Battle of Tourond's Coulee is a Métis victory.

From May 9 to 12, the Métis fight the Canadian troops at Batoche. On May 12, tired and out of ammunition, the Métis valiantly succumb to a hasty charge by the Canadian troops. Many Métis homes are pillaged and burned and many Métis women and children hide along the riverbank to avoid capture. Gabriel Dumont escapes to the United States. Louis Riel surrenders on May 15, three days after the battle.

Louis Riel's trial for treason begins on July 20. During the trial, Riel outlines the undemocratic treatment of the Métis, defends his sanity, and explains his vision for the country. Ontarians demand his execution, and French-Canadians in Quebec argue for clemency.

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1885
[continued]

On Aug. 1, Louis Riel is found guilty of high treason, although the jury recommends mercy. The judge ignores the jury's recommendation of clemency and sentences Riel to death.

Louis Riel is executed on Nov. 16. Riel's trial and execution causes great conflict within the new country. For English Canadians in Ontario and elsewhere, Riel's execution is a message that Western Canada will be run by and for Anglo-Protestants. For French-Canadians, Riel's execution is an attack on the French fact in Canada.

1885-1960

The Road Allowance period of Métis history begins. The Métis are socially, economically, and politically marginalized by the dominant society within the Prairie West, with many squatting in makeshift homes along road allowances (the land on either side of rural roads). Many Métis are dispersed to Montana, North Dakota, and the Peace River district of what is now Alberta following the 1885 Northwest Resistance.

1887

The Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph is founded in St. Boniface, Man., on July 17.

1896

St. Paul des Métis is founded as a Métis agriculture colony in what is now Alberta. However, by 1909 the community is dissolved and the land is given to French Canadians.

1930

The Natural Resources Transfer Agreement returns control of public lands and natural resources to the three Prairie provinces. The Métis are impacted by paragraph 12, which argues that Indians have the right to harvest food on unused Crown land. The federal government absolves itself of any further responsibility for the Métis.

1935

The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration is established by the federal government. The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act creates common community pastures, which eventually lead to the forced removal of many Métis living along unused Crown land, the most notorious example being in Ste. Madeleine, Man.

1938

L'Association des Métis d'Alberta et des Territoires du Nord-Ouest lobbies Alberta's government to set aside a land base for the Métis. Alberta's government passes the Métis Population Betterment Act, which identifies the lands for Métis settlement. This land base will ultimately become known as the Alberta Métis Settlements, the only land base in Canada set aside for the Métis.

1940-1960

Some 12 Métis settlements are originally set aside in Alberta, but four of these are rescinded in 1940s and 1950s when they prove unsuitable for farming, hunting and fishing. These lands return to the Alberta government, leaving eight Métis settlements in Alberta comprising 1.25 million acres.

In 1945, the Saskatchewan government buys the Oblate-run Métis farm in Lebret and later establishes other Métis farms in Baljennie, Crescent Lake, Crooked Lake, Duck Lake, Glen Mary, Green Lake, Lestock and Willow Bunch in order to "rehabilitate" southern Métis. Many Métis are forced onto the farms against their will, and some witness government authorities burning down their homes when they board trains to go to the Métis farms. The farms prove to be paternalistic and the Métis, preferring wage labour positions in cities, abandon the farms in the mid-1950s.

1973

Maria Campbell's *Half-Breed* is published. Campbell's book brings public attention to the Métis' marginalization by the dominant society.

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- 1981** On April 15, the Manitoba Métis Federation and the Native Council of Canada file a claim against the federal government and the Manitoba government for breach of fiduciary duty and for failing to fulfill land-related promises to the Métis following the events of 1869-70. Despite its recognition of Métis land rights in the original province of Manitoba and then by the Dominion Lands Act in the rest of the Prairies, northeastern British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories, the federal government maintains that Métis land rights have been extinguished by law and that any future interventions on their behalf have to come from the provinces.
- 1982** The Métis are recognized as one Canada's three Aboriginal peoples in Sec. 35(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982. Harry Daniels is most responsible for putting the Métis in the Constitution.
- 1983** The Métis National Council is founded by the Alberta Métis Society, the Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan, and the Manitoba Métis Federation. The Métis Nation of Ontario and the Métis Nation British Columbia would join the Council in the 1980s and the Métis Nation of Ontario in the 1990s.
- 1989** On July 1, the Federation of Métis Settlements and the Province of Alberta sign the Alberta-Métis Settlements Accord. It involves agreements to establish the Métis Settlements as a permanent land base with the Métis people managing their own government and affairs.
- 2003** On Sept. 19, in *R. v. Powley*, the Supreme Court of Canada declares that the Métis respondents Steve and Roddy Powley have an Indigenous right to hunt through Sec. 35 of the Constitution. Through ancestry and community "tests," this right can apply to any Métis living in the Métis Nation Homeland if the Métis defendant can demonstrate a connection to a historic Métis community. The case will affect Métis case law across Canada. The case has its origins in 1993 when Steve and Roddy Powley killed a bull moose just outside Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., and tagged their catch with a Métis card and a note that read "harvesting my meat for winter." One week later, the Powleys were charged by conservation officers for hunting moose without a licence and unlawful possession of moose contrary to Ontario's Game and Fish Act.
- 2013** In January, in *Daniels v. Canada*, the Federal Court of Canada rules that Métis and non-status Indians are "Indians" for the purposes of Sec. 91 (24) of the Constitution and are thus under federal jurisdiction.
- On March 8, the Supreme Court of Canada rules in *Manitoba Métis Federation v. Canada* that the Crown failed to live up to the obligations in implementing the land grant provisions of the Manitoba Act. The case began in 1981.
- 2016** On April 14, the Supreme Court of Canada upholds the earlier federal court ruling that established that the Métis are "Indians" for the purposes of Sec. 91 (24) and are therefore a federal responsibility. The court rules that non-status Indians are no longer considered Indians for the purposes of Sec. 91 (24).
- 2017** On April 13, the Canada-Métis Nation Accord, signed by the Métis National Council and the Government of Canada, comes into effect. The accord outlines how the two levels of government will work together to ensure that the federal Crown deals honourably with the concerns of the Métis Nation.