

Canada's Aboriginal People

Aboriginal peoples occupied and thrived before Canada became an organized country in 1867 and in Canada today are recognized in the Constitution as comprising three main nations: First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Each of these nations is comprised of many nations with very diverse cultures, languages, economies, and histories. It is imperative to realize and respect that Aboriginal peoples are unique in their beliefs, spirituality, customs, histories, and languages. Different peoples with distinct languages could live in the same area and even sometimes overlapped. People within any one geographic area are not necessarily the same. There could be much diversity within a geographic area, as there is across Canada.

It is important to note that as we attempt to frame the changes to the Aboriginal peoples' ancestry, continuums may be based on a multitude of quantifiers – cultural, geographic, urban/rural, language or values. Individuals may be anywhere on the continuum or not at all.

This is an example of a cultural continuum based on religion:



First Nations, Métis and Inuit in Ontario

In Northern Ontario, there are four major First Nations: **Anishinaabe** (Ojibway), **Oji-Cree**, **Mushkegowuk Cree** (formerly known as Swampy Cree), and the **Métis Nation**. When teaching about these nations in a historical time period, always ensure that you have a map of that time period as migration did occur over time.

Sharing of Knowledge

For centuries, First Nations, Métis and Inuit have adapted their life and living to regionally specific environments. They shared their knowledge about living a good life in North America's varied landscapes and climates when newcomers came and many of these teachings were adapted into such things as our Democratic systems of government. Around 1500, the first Europeans who arrived in North America were introduced to new plants that were edible and used in medicines. New comers were also introduced to new ideas and art and expression, as well as the existing technologies and material cultures of the Indigenous peoples.

The Inuit in the Arctic and sub-Arctic lived in family settlements based on seasonal use and availability of resources. Rich cultures that fitted within sometimes harsh environments, Inuit invented such technologies as the igloo, which enabled them to take advantage of available resources and to survive severe cold temperatures and perfected the kayak to withstand icy waters and to be able to place the boat upright without



getting out if the kayak capsized.

In Eastern North America, First Nation peoples lived in large settlements and invented a number of ecological technologies that allowed them to thrive and prosper. For example, bark canoes as a means of transportation to get through the waterways while exploring and moving through the dense forests. Métis would adapt many of the indigenous technologies for use within a globalized fur trade.

The First Nation and Métis peoples living in the Prairies also had unique settlements and moved within the west to hunt buffalo; to trade, and they had extensive settlements around fishing sites. They invented teepees, a lightweight dwelling made of poles arranged in a cone shape covered with animal skins, and made a number of advancements before 1867.

Along the Pacific Coast, First Nation peoples continue to live in permanent villages based on rich annual renewing coastal and interior fishing resources. Many different nations had well established expressive material culture and rich oral traditions.

The Europeans learned many new skills and knowledge from the First Nations, Métis and Inuit which continue to be shared today. For example, snow shoeing is a fantastic way to get around in the winter and canoeing in the summer. The health benefits of country foods is what helped get many communities established. If this knowledge had not been shared, it is debatable whether or not Europeans would ever have established themselves. Life would have been different without the contributions from First Nations, Métis and Inuit.



Scotch Settlement School House at Saugeen First Nation

Anishinaabe

In Ontario, the term Anishinaabe most often refers to the three nations that formed a Confederacy known as the Three Fires Confederacy: Ojibway (Faith Keepers), Odawa (Warriors and Traders), and Potawatomi (Fire Keepers). The Anishinaabe have a long and proud history:

- Language of these three nations belongs to the Algonkian family.
- They share similar cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.
- History of Anishinaabe began on the east coast of Turtle Island (North America) long before European contact.
- Seven prophets came to the Anishinaabe people at that time and foretold of the European people and future hardships.
- For survival, they urged the people to migrate and their prophecy is known as the Seven Fires Prophecy.
- **Seven Fires** refers to the seven places of migration along the way: St. Lawrence River (of a turtle-shaped island), Niagara Falls, the Detroit River, Manitoulin Island, Baawating (Sault Ste. Marie), Duluth, and finally Madeline Island (Wisconsin).
- In 1650, the Ojibway fled from the Iroquois, but later in this century the Ojibway went on the offensive and drove the Iroquois from most of southern Ontario.
- By the mid 1700's, Three Fires Confederacy became the core of the Western Lakes Confederacy, and were joined by the Huron, Algonquins, Nipissing, Sauks, Foxes and others.
- They met on a regular basis at their own fire within that of the larger council, where each nation would debate its position internally. Once in agreement, one speaker would share it with the Grand Council.
- After 1812, the British established enough military force that they felt they did not need allies and stopped treating the members of the Western Lakes Confederacy with respect or fairness. During the following decades, many treaties took land from Aboriginal peoples.
- In 1870, the Grand General Indian Council of Ontario and Quebec met (with almost all bands of S. Ontario and Lake Huron taking part) to review and revise the Indian Act of 1876.
- By the early 1900's, the Grand Council began to decline, as the Indian agents began to refuse or allow the use of band funds for travel.
- In 1949, the Grand Indian Council was replaced by the Union of Ontario Indians (UOI), which today represents 43 First Nations along Lake Huron and Lake Superior and in the southern parts of Ontario.

Oji-Cree Anishinanimowin

The Oji-Cree Anishinanimowin or Oji-Cree (sometimes called Severn Ojibway) is closely related to the Ojibway language, but has a different literacy tradition based in Cree, with several phonological and grammatical differences:

- This Nation has communities throughout northeastern Ontario (with the Cree to the north and Ojibway to the south) and at Island Lake in Manitoba, and along the shores of Lake Winnipeg and the rivers that drain into it. Oji-Cree is often grouped together with Ojibway and related languages.
- The orthography of Oji-Cree is Algonquian Syllabics, with western-style finals, but with an eastern placement of the w-dot. It is typically not written in any sort of Roman writing system.

Muskegowuk

Before contact, Woodland (Muskegowuk) Cree lived in Northern Ontario and Manitoba, while Mistassini Cree lived in Quebec, and Plains Cree lived west of Lake Winnipeg.

The culture of the Muskegowuk is influenced by the land, climate, vegetation, and animal life. Although many Cree live in First Nations communities along the northern coast, many still take part in traditional activities that change with the seasons:

- They are knowledgeable about the changes in seasons, phases of the moon, length of day, growth of plants, and migration of birds and animals.
- They live in small family groupings far from each other so as not to overhunt during the winter; each traditional area supported fishing, hunting and trapping.
- In winter, the women made clothing from skins that had been tanned, using quills and dyes as decorations.
- Families travelled to traditional meeting places to hunt ducks and geese returning from migration.

Métis

The Métis are a separate and distinct people with ancestry from traditional Métis territories. These catchment areas are not reserves. Métis rights are Aboriginal as affirmed by the Constitution of Canada 1982. Métis people are as different from First Nations people as the Inuit are.

Prior to Canada being established as a Nation, the Métis people emerged as a distinct culture as a result of different relations of First Nations men and women and Europeans. While the initial offspring of these unions were individuals who possessed mixed ancestry, the gradual establishment of distinct Métis communities, outside of either First Nation or European cultures and settlements, took hold long before 1867. Subsequent intermarriages between Métis women and Métis men, resulted in the genesis of new Aboriginal peoples – the Métis.

The Métis constitute a distinct Aboriginal nation and Ontario has the second largest population of Métis today. The Métis Nation grounds its assertion of Aboriginal nationhood on well-recognized international principles. It has a shared history, common culture (song, dance, national symbols, etc.), unique language (Michif with various regional dialects), extensive kinship connections from Ontario westward, distinct way of life, traditional territory and collective consciousness.

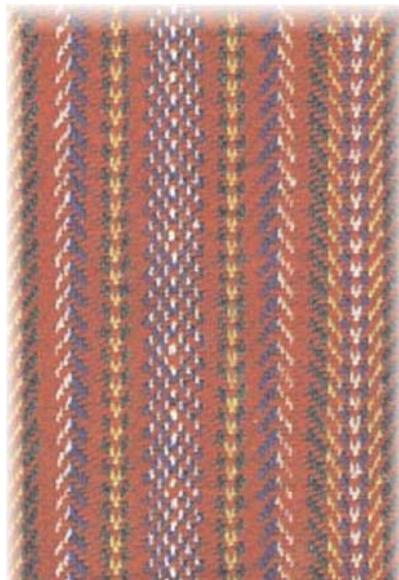
In March 1983, the Métis Nation separated from the Native Council of Canada to form the Métis National Council – its own Métis-specific representative body. The Métis National Council represents the Métis nation nationally and internationally. It receives its mandate and direction from the democratically elected leadership of the Métis Nation's governments from Ontario Westward (Métis Nation of Ontario, Manitoba Métis Federation, Métis Nation – Saskatchewan, Métis Nation of Alberta, Métis Nation – British Columbia).

Within Ontario, historic Métis communities arose along watersheds throughout the province and have distinct histories and characteristics. In contemporary times, the Métis Nation of Ontario has identified 9 administrative regions with over 26 regional councils. Sometimes these communities are found within larger non-aboriginal communities. Métis people live throughout Ontario in urban, rural or remote areas.

The rights of the Métis people in western Canada have been a topic for debate since the events of Red River and Batoche. In Ontario, Métis rights were finally acknowledged in 2003 by Canada, and so some might argue that they are a relatively young Aboriginal nation. However, the struggle for recognition and the resistance from assimilation have been on-going as is the case for all indigenous peoples in North America after contact. Since 1870, the government of Canada has dealt with the Métis differently from First Nations or Inuit. Following the transfer of Rupert's Land to Canada, the federal government dispatched Commissioners to the West to settle legal issues, in particular ownership of the land, with the Métis outside the Treaty process. The Commissioners collected signatures on two kinds of documents:

- * Collective treaties for Indian bands, and
- * Scrips for Métis individuals.

In the 1930's, The Métis Nation in Alberta established a 1.25 million acre settlement area in northern Alberta. In the 1960's and 1970's, the Métis movement took shape, in part empowered with many elements of course: the Canadian Bill of Rights (1960), the Civil Rights movement, and the AIM (American Indian Movement) movements all played a part in the growing consciousness of the Métis.



The Constitution Act (1982) affirms and recognizes Aboriginal and treaty rights which include First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada; however, recognition remains an unfulfilled promise to the Métis peoples. The Government of Canada wrongly assumed the position that Métis had no existing Aboriginal rights; thus, refused to negotiate and deal with the Métis. In the 1990's, the Métis began seeking justice in the court system advocating for their rights. The Powley case was the first one to be heard in the highest court and the Supreme court decided on September 19, 2003, that Métis peoples have existing Aboriginal rights, affirmed and recognizes under Section 35 of the Constitution Act, as "a substantive promise to the Métis that recognizes their distinct existence and protects their existing Aboriginal rights". The Métis National Council states "The Powley decision marks a new day for the Métis Nation in Canada. The Supreme Court's decision is a respectful affirmation of what the Métis people have always believed and stood up for, as well as an opportunity for Canada to begin fulfilling its substantive promise to the Métis".

On July 7, 2004, an agreement was made between the Métis Nation of Ontario and Ministry of Natural Resources which recognized the Métis Nation of Ontario's Harvest Card system. The Métis peoples who hold a Harvester's Certificate and holds Métis citizenship can exercise their harvesting rights within his or her traditional territory and in accordance to the Interim Enforcement Policy; thus, no violation of conservation or safety charges would apply. There is a maximum number of Harvester's Certificates that can be issued annually. There is a mutual agreement that these limits may change from year to

year which is dependent on historical research and an evaluation on Métis Nation of Ontario's registry system and processes.

Ontario and the Métis Nation of Ontario have signed a framework agreement and there are other bidding agreements, like a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education, that are putting in place working relationships and resources to improve the state of relations between Métis and all other Ontarians. Ontario leads the way in Canada for the implementation of Métis rights and in cooperation there is a great deal that can be achieved politically, socially and economically. This is a significant change from the past when Métis would resist government action and opens new mutual benefits for all Ontarians.



Resources

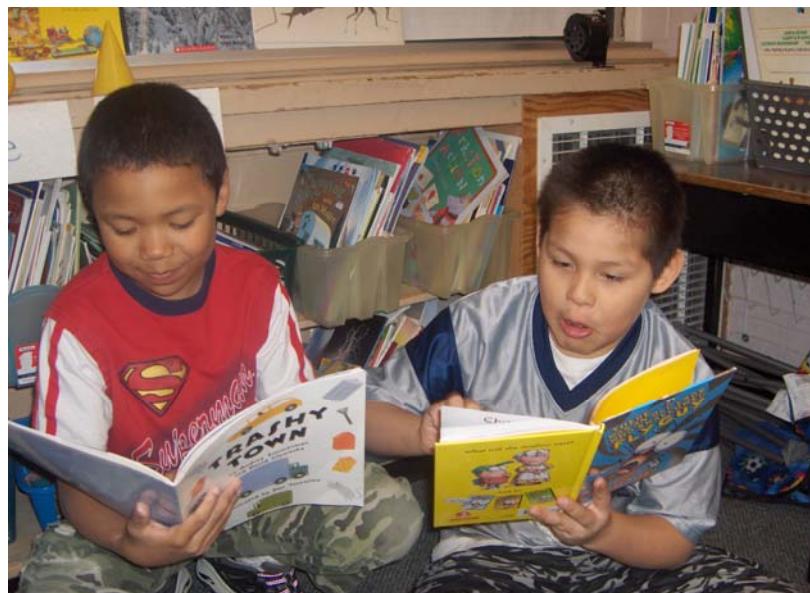
The Joining of Two Cultures, The Existence of a People Forever, The Métis Nation of Ontario.
Jason Madden, 2002.

Aboriginal Peoples and Their Heritage; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada; http://wwwainc-inac.gc.ca/hrtg/index_e.html

Culture -Jigging; Métis Nation of Ontario;
http://www.metisnation.org/culture/culture_links/jigging.html

Traditional Métis Music and Dance;
<http://www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca/history/music.htm>

Aboriginal Innovations in Arts, Science and Technology
<http://www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal/handbook/index-e.html>



Inuit



Photo from <http://www.innu.ca/>

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, formerly Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, is the national voice of Canada's Inuit. Founded in 1971, the organization represents and promotes the interests of Inuit. In its history, ITK has been effective and successful at advancing Inuit interests by forging constructive and co-operative relationships with different levels of government in Canada, notably in the area of comprehensive land claim settlements, and representing Inuit during the constitutional talks of the 1980s.

Facts

- Canada is home to 50,480 Inuit. They live in 53 Arctic communities in four geographic regions: Nunatsiavut (Labrador); Nunavik (Quebec); Nunavut; and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region of the Northwest Territories.
- Inuit regions constitute the majority in what amounts to 40 per cent of Canada's land mass.
- Inuit do not have tax-exempt status anywhere in Canada.
- ITK, the national organization, is comprised of four regional Inuit associations, the National Inuit Youth Council and the Inuit Circumpolar Conference.
- These groups have specific mandates to represent Inuit on a variety of regional, national and international issues that fall outside the terms of the land claim settlements.

Accomplishments

- Land claim settlements - Inuit have successfully concluded landmark comprehensive land claim agreements across Inuit Nunangat. Inuit representatives have signed land claim settlements in all four regions. (Nunavik, Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut and Nunatsiavut).
- Creation of Nunavut - On April 1, 1999, the Territory of Nunavut was created.
- Inuit-specific agenda - Inuit, in close cooperation with ITK, have developed an all-encompassing agenda and action plan that lays out Inuit-specific strategies and solutions tailored to Inuit concerns.
- The philosophy behind this agenda is that Inuit are seeking self-reliance and full participation in all aspects of Canadian society.

Challenges

Despite successes on the land claims front, Inuit still face enormous challenges in their quest for equal opportunity and prosperity in Canada. Specifically, they want the federal government to recognize that Inuit have different concerns and needs from other Aboriginal people and to commit itself to Inuit-

specific policies and programs. Part and parcel of a new relationship with the government is a commitment to stable and predictable funding for Inuit organizations. This is vital if Inuit are to have access to programs and services that help raise their standard of living to levels enjoyed by other Canadians.

Source - <http://www.itk.ca/about-itk>



Inuit Today

Inuit continue to maintain their unique culture within their distinct homeland. Despite modern influences and conveniences, Inuit have retained their language, core knowledge and beliefs.

Family is the foundation of Inuit culture and the family is surrounded by a larger social network that includes the rest of the community, even the region. Inuit families are large and interconnected as intricate bonds are formed through childbirth, marriage and adoption.

Since the 1970s and early 1980s, satellite television and radio signals have brought world events and popular programming into Inuit homes. DVDs, video games and Internet access are also widely available. Organized sports play a large role in local recreation, as do movie theatres and fast food outlets. Despite all of the modern amenities, however, thousands of years of tradition still shape the nature of the communities.

Hunting is still one of the most important aspects of Inuit culture and lifestyle. Despite the availability of store-bought food, Inuit continue to rely on country food as a source of nutrition and clothing.

Inuit cherish their youth, elders and the generation between them. Elders are given the utmost respect in any community because of their knowledge and wisdom, which they in turn teach to younger generations. Their continuous contribution has kept the Inuit tradition alive.

Many families leave permanent communities during the spring and summer to set up camps. This is an important part of Inuit tradition. Far from modern distractions, the young are immersed in their language, developing their skill and helping to ensure the long-term survival of the culture.



Resources

<http://www.inuit2010.ca> A website dedicated to getting the word out that 2010 is the Year of the Inuit.

<http://www.itk.ca/> Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) is the national Inuit organization in Canada, representing four Inuit regions – Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories.