

The Metis: A unique culture alive and well

BY BRYANNA SCOTT



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MAN VOICES

Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism Advisory Committee produces this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

I AM writing to encourage dialogue that will address common misunderstandings or assumptions about Aboriginal people within our larger community and hopefully create a greater understanding of diversity within Northwestern Ontario. I am expressing my personal views and understanding and I am not representing any organization.

Within the Constitution, we know that there are three legally identified groups of people — First Nations, Inuit, and Metis. As a self-identified Metis, I hope you find the following interesting and educational, while I try to shed some light on who the Metis are and what it means to be Metis.

The identity of the Metis people in Canada goes back to the 1600s when the Europeans began to make alliances with First Nations people during the Fur Trade era. The alliances were created because the Europeans knew the First Nations people controlled the waterways and transportation routes.

During this time, First Nations women played a large role in assisting the European men with cooking, tending to their ailments, sewing clothes and creating moccasins and

snowshoes for them during the winter months. European men began forming families and having children with these First Nations women. The children of these unions would eventually become the Metis Nation of Canada.

Metis comes from a French word meaning 'mixed.' Often described as an ethnogenesis creation of a new ethnic group, that is exactly how the creation of the Metis people came to be as represented in the 'mixed blood' children

that resulted from these unions. It has never mattered much the degree to which one's blood is Aboriginal versus that of European. What matters is that these two cultures mixed and the offspring of these unions identified as Metis.

The uniqueness of the Metis comes from combining European and First Nations traditions, languages and customs. For example, the Metis jig is dance that mixed traditional First Nations footwork with that of the Scottish, Irish and French jigging.

The language of Michif is a mix of First Nations dialects (Cree and Ojibway) with English or French.

The unique sound of fiddling is the result of the Metis watching and listening to the fiddle music of the French and Scottish but then adding some of their own distinctive sounds.

In Ontario, the culture of the Metis is alive and well. The Metis take great pride in themselves as a people. The Metis Nation of Ontario is the only provincially recognized political organization for Metis people in Ontario and there is a central registry where people can apply for their membership. The head office for the Metis Nation of Ontario is located in Ottawa.

The Metis Nation of Ontario has served its people well as it continues to fight and advocate for the rights of the Metis people using the Constitution Act and court decisions to ensure that their rights are not abrogated or displaced by governments.

You may have noticed in late August, the Metis Nation of Ontario held its annual general assembly in Thunder Bay.

Some people travel miles and miles away to different countries to experience new and exciting cultures and traditions.

Before you plan your next visit, why not take a trip to further your understanding of the Metis people who live in your communities?

Attend a local event, stop by a bookstore to purchase a book about the Metis, or ask around on how you can broaden your awareness and understanding of a unique culture of people living right here in Thunder Bay and surrounding Northwestern Ontario communities.

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