Thank you for the opportunity to tell part of the

Métis Story

The larger Métis History narrative is not often told. Because the narrative is often told from either First Nation or Fur Trader perspective. Most researchers will not find the word "Métis" within the historic record. Rather, they find First Nation's, fur trade employees, and others. Post-Powley Métis Research has made excellent progress in identifying the "others."

In both in popular and academic journals, there has been a focus on Louis Riel and the Red River. While the Red River is important to the Métis narrative it is only one piece of the larger narrative. And it is certainly not the beginning nor is it the end of the Métis Story. However, many historical documents used in Métis identification were created as a result of the events of 1869 and 1885.
Introduction

Who were the Historic Métis of the Northwest? The progenitive generation were First Nation’s women and non-aboriginal Fur Traders. Their descendants, after successive generations of mixed aboriginal intermarriage created a distinct and unique culture in the Northwest. These descendants are the historic Métis of the Northwest.

Therefore, it is not the case that 9 months after the reaching the east coast, the first Métis was born! That belief under mines the distinct culture and language that emerged as a result of Métis Ethnogenesis.

Hudson’s Bay Company: 1670 – Present

North West Company: 1779-1821

Above introduction paraphrased from Jason Madden. "Lakehead University: Métis Recognition & Rights - The Time has Come."
Métis Ethnogenesis:  
*The Birth of a Culture*

Ethnogenesis occurred in the Historic Northwest, a general area that was not yet open to settlement. There the Métis were able to "incubate" for a series of generations undisturbed to develop a distinct identity and culture without being absorbed or subdued by a dominant European or First Nations culture. Métis Ethnogenesis did not happen overnight. Ethnogenesis occurred approximately around the same time across the homeland. This is because the homeland was not disconnected. There were distinct networks of communication from Ontario west into BC.

Métis not simply a mixed ancestry peoples, we come from historic communities that emerged before Canada was Canada. This is an important point because much of the research into BC Métis previously focused on identifying individuals of mixed aboriginal ancestry - which was both incorrect and damaging to our interests. Although connected to both fur trade and First Nations communities, Métis were recognized as being distinct and separate from their First Nations and European relatives.
Métis Ethnogenesis by Geographic Location:

- Upper Great Lakes - 1790-1815
- Southwestern Manitoba - 1815
- Northern Saskatchewan - 1820
- South Central Alberta - 1817

“To date we have nine (9) court-determined dates of effective control.”

- Jean Teillet, 2013

1. New Brunswick - 1670
2. Ontario, Sault Ste Marie - 1815-1850
3. Saskatchewan, northwest - 1912
4. Saskatchewan, Qu’Appelle Valley - 1882 to the early 1900s
5. Manitoba, inside the Postage Stamp Province - 1870
6. Manitoba, south-west outside the Postage Stamp Province - 1880
7. Manitoba, San Clara and environs, west-central – 1885
8. Alberta, southern - 1874-1878
9. British Columbia, Okanagan area - 1858-1864
Two waves of Métis advancement into BC:  

1st Wave: 1790s – 1840s

This first wave consisted primarily of employees associated with fur traders such as Alexander Mackenzie, Simon Fraser, David Thompson, Daniel Harmon, Pierre Bostineaux, Samuel Black, Peter S. Ogden, and James Sinclair.

The networks of communication are clearly visible when one considers the transportation routes used in the fur trade. Often referred to as the children of the fur trade, Métis communities did not emerge in the absence of the fur trade.

It is interesting to note the two major points of entry from Alberta into BC being the routes taken by Sir Alexander Mackenzie and by David Thompson. Mackenzie through the Peace River district and Thompson through the Athabasca Pass. Essentially, the Peace River route was used to supply New Caledonia whereas the Athabasca route supplied the Columbia District.
These two maps suggest the correlation between major Fur Trade routes and the larger Fur Trade System of the Hudson's Bay Company. Specifically, the route taken by David Thompson through the Columbia became the Western portion of York Factory Express route which was used to convey peoples and correspondence between the Columbia division in Oregon and the Supply Depot of York Factory.

Map showing Columbia supply route from York Factory to Fort Vancouver

Map showing Columbia supply route from York Factory to Fort Vancouver

This map shows the Major Fur Trade Routes within the Province of BC, which is significant because it highlights the historic highways used by the Métis. This is valuable because it shows where the Métis were, and by contrast where the Métis historically were not. The two primary points of entry into BC were via either Dunvegan, Alberta or through Jasper House, Alberta. This is important because the Métis in BC were not disconnected from the Métis in Alberta and further east across the homeland. It is also interesting to note that the communication routes east of the Rocky Mountains were primarily in an east to west direction. Whereas, west of the divide, in BC, communication was generally a north to south direction.

Map Showing Fur Trade Routes of Métis in BC and Historic timeframe

SKETCH MAP OF THE PRINCIPAL RIVER SYSTEMS, POSTS AND PASSES OF THE TRANSMOUNTAIN FUR TRADE COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

MAP NOT TO SCALE

Two waves of Métis advancement into BC:

2nd Wave: 1850s–1900

The second wave of Métis Advancement occurred during the 1858 Gold Rush and continued during the Klondike Gold Rush years.

Métis settlement largely centered in the Peace River Block and the Kootenay-Columbia district.

In fact it was the influence of Métis on First Nations within the Peace River and Athabasca districts that prompted the Federal Government to negotiate Treaty 8 and include the Métis within the Northwest Half-breed Claims Commission.
Map Showing Connectivity of Historic Métis Communities

Peace River Community:
* Est. circa 1800
  - Fort St. John
  - Fort St. James
  - Hudson's Hope

Kelly Lake New Caledonia Community:
* Est. circa 1803
  - Prince George
  - Tete Jaune Cache
  - Fort Alexandria

Kamloops Columbia Community:
* Est. circa 1806
  - Boat Encampment
  - Golden/Lake Windermere
  - Fort Langley
  - Fort Victoria/Nanaimo

Intercommunity Corridors:
* Jasper House, Alberta
* Langley to Kamloops
* Fort St. James to Prince George
Showing current residence of Métis applying for scrip during Treaty 8.
How do we know that we were here?

We were recognized by others as being in BC:

*Travel Authors and Roman Catholic Recognition of Métis in BC*

Noted writers such as Paul Kane and David Douglas both travelled across the Rockies in the care of the Hudson's Bay Company. Both writers documented Métis west of the Rockies. For example, Paul Kane's Boat Encampment visualizes the location used by David Thompson in 1811 before he traveled down the Columbia. Note the sash within the painting - around the waist of the individual at the forefront.

In 1838 Fathers Blanchet and Demers baptized 35 Métis children from 16 families living at Jasper House, Alberta. It is interesting that among the 35 Métis children, at least three are identified as 3rd generation Métis. In 1841, Father Pierre De Smet noted the presence of Métis within the Kootenay-Columbia territory. In fact, the Métis that De Smet baptized were connected genealogically to Métis at Jasper House and Métis within the Columbia District in what would become Montana.


* De Smet, Pierre, De Smet's Letters and Sketches: 1841-1842 (originally published in 1843 under the following title: "Letters and Sketches: with A Narrative of a Year's Residence among the Indian Tribes of the Rocky Mountains.) 357.
Aboriginal Recognition of Métis in BC

Not only were Métis recognized by Travel writers and Roman Catholic priests, we were also identified by First Nations.

The Shuswap were documented as active fur trappers within Central Interior of BC extending through the Kootenay-Columbia District into the Jasper House community. In fact, several Métis in the Kootenay-Columbia District married into the Kinbasket band of the Shuswap.

According to a 2008 Traditional Land Use Study, Shuswap elders stated that "The Shuswap were encouraged to trade at Rocky Mountain House, although due to the attacks by the Métis the Shuswap preferred [to trade] at the Fort at Kamloops." According to Ethnologist James Teit, Métis occupied territory around Tete Jaune Cache extending into Jasper House, Alberta.

* RE Tsqwatsstens-kucw ne Csaliken* Our People Between the Two Mountain Ranges. Shuswap Indian Band Traditional Land Use Study. 2008.
This map and the accompanying place names list was created by James Teit and published in 1909. According to Teit, the information about the Métis was collected from Shuswap Elders who were familiar with Shuswap history.

It is of extreme significance that Teit ascribed the name "Le'matcif" to the Métis community because the Michif language of the Métis was not studied or spoken outside the community until the 1960s. It is this type of connection to the Historic Homeland that has often been overlooked by Métis researchers.

Another important feature about the map is that it clearly shows that the Shuswap recognized Métis as having traditional territory. For example, Teit noted that the Métis territory was "temporarily occupied by the Sekanai." In other words, the territory was acknowledged to have been at one time exclusively occupied by Métis.

Federal Recognition of Métis in BC

In addition, Métis were recognized by the Federal government as occupying land within the Mackenzie and Peace River Districts of BC.

The Klondike Gold Rush was the impetus for the Federal Government to negotiate with First Nations and Métis in the region covered by Treaty 8. The half-breed Commission was instructed "not [to] accord more liberal terms than were accorded to the Half breeds of Manitoba and the other territories.

Region "A" is the territory covered by Treaty 8 within the Province of British Columbia

Public notice was issued in June of 1898, indicating the Federal Government's intention of "treating with the Indians and Half-breeds of the Provisional District of Athabasca and such territory immediately adjacent thereto and it is deemed advisable to include within the said Treaty the extinguishment of their title to the lands."

This is further indication that the Métis in BC were acknowledged to be connected to the Historic Homeland.

* MNB Historic Document Database: 1898 Public notice of Treaty 8, June 21, 1898; also see Bourdon, Abe "Recognition of Half-breed or Métis Title" a Métis Resources Report," August 29, 2007.
The total number of Half-breeds within the Treaty 8 area was given as 1700. However, as this document shows, that number did not include those in British Columbia. There is no evidence of the Half-breed Commission ever having visited Fort St. John. In fact, for the regions included within BC, the Federal Government was unable to provide an estimate of the total number of Métis. Furthermore, according to internal estimates, the Federal government did not provide food rations for points within BC. This is yet another document that suggests there was no effort by the Federal Government to identify how many Métis were in the Mackenzie and Peace River Districts.
Then why are we so difficult to find?

* Paul Kane, "Winter Traveling in Dog Sleds." 1849-5
The Forgotten and Invisible People

Because Métis in BC were historically grouped with mixed aboriginals and non-status Indians, historic Métis identification can be difficult to say the least.

Racism in Law: The Indian Act: Because of the fact that the Indian Act provided no provisions for Métis outside of Manitoba, the welfare of Métis and other mixed aboriginals often fell to the discretion of the local Indian Agent.

Racism in Economy: Relegated to Resource extraction industries. For example, mining, lumbering, and ranching. Métis were largely restricted to manual labour and often unable to advance within the economics of the industry.

Racism in Society: Unable to progress socially beyond the immediate community so long as the individual is identified as Métis. For example, in his autobiography, former BC Premier Simon Fraser Tolmie completely overlooked his Métis heritage, despite the influence of his Métis ancestor within the Victoria community.

Systemic Indifference of Census Enumerators and Indian Agents: Métis are difficult to identify in the historic record because we were identified along with mixed aboriginals simply as half-breeds.

Because of the Rocky Mountains we had to leave our Red River Carts at the Alberta Border!
Jean Baptiste Boucher:  
"The Terrible Waccan"

* William Boucher and son Joseph, c. 1911
It is important to note that the Indian Agent also provided judgment on the moral character and temperance of the Half-breeds. The reason this information was provided was that if the Indian Agent found that the Half-breed was intemperate and or morally unfit, then they would remove the Half-breeds from the reservation.

This is significant because it clearly indicates that the external identity and to a degree legal identity was based on the moral compass of a particular Indian Agent.

*Correspondence Regarding the Presence of Half Breeds on Different Reserves in British Columbia Census. Online MIKAN No. 2061320, 22.*
CONCLUSION:
Part of the National Fabric

Unlike other Mixed Aboriginals in BC, expressions of Métis Nationalism can be identified within our collective history. This presentation has demonstrated evidence that Métis in BC thought of themselves as being connected to the Historic Métis Homeland. That First Nations identified them in connection to the Historic Métis Homeland. And that the Government of Canada identified them as being connected to the Historic Métis Homeland.
Merci, Thank You, Marsee
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