



Métis Farming in Saskatchewan

Native Studies Thirty



CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Native Studies 30 Unit 4, Economic Development

<http://www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/docs/native30/index.html>

LESSON PLAN ONE: CLASSROOM INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will learn the historical background of Métis farming in Saskatchewan. They will learn about Métis riverlot farms and the western discontent with Ottawa's policies that led to the North West Resistance of 1885 and how the aftermath of the Resistance affected Métis communities and farms.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- *Métis Farming in Saskatchewan* (appendix one), *Riverlot System and Scrip* (appendix two) and Fast Facts found at the end of this resource package
- *Métis Farmers*, by Todd Paquin, Patrick Young and Darren Prefontaine, 2003, *Métis Land Rights and Self-Government*, by Leah Dorion and Darren Prefontaine, 2003, and *Saskatchewan Métis Fact Sheet*, by Leah Dorion, 2003 on the Gabriel Dumont Institute's (GDI) *The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture* at <http://www.metismuseum.ca>

PROCEDURE

1. Prepare to teach by reading the papers listed above in Resources and Materials.
2. Teach the students about the Métis exodus from Manitoba following the Red River Resistance of 1869 and the Manitoba Act of 1870.
3. Discuss the situation. Discuss the fairness and equity of the treatment of Métis people. Discuss unfairness and inequity. Discuss the underlying motives of the Canadian government to assimilate Métis and First Nations.

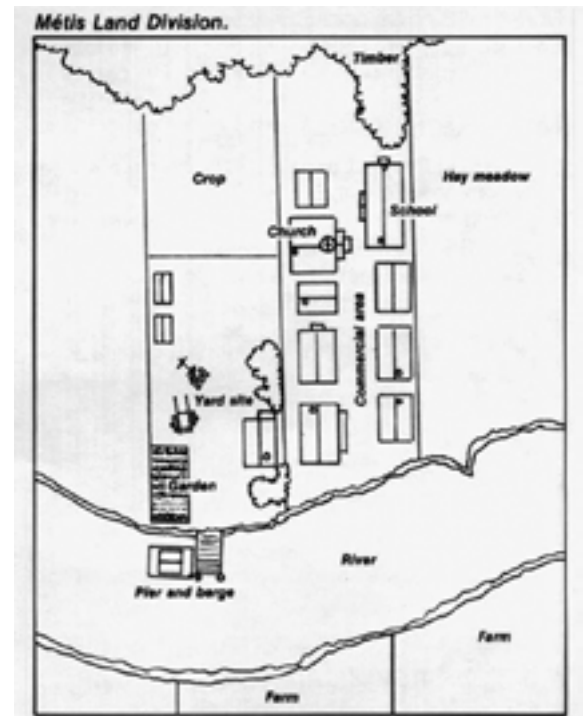


Illustration by Charles Belhumeur of traditional Métis river lots. Gabriel Dumont Institute Sub_0168



ADAPTATION AND EXTENSION

1. Assign half of the class to research the mind-set of government authorities towards Aboriginal people during the early years of the twentieth century. Assign the other half of the class to investigate the understandings, motivations and mind-sets of Métis and First Nations leaders in the decades leading to Saskatchewan becoming a province. What were the prevailing opinions that each side held to be true? In the classroom, debate the early history of Métis farming, arguing from the vantage point of a Canadian government official in 1905 and a Métis farm family in 1905.
2. Borrow the education kit *Expressing Our Heritage: Métis Artistic Designs*, from the Gabriel Dumont Institute to learn more about the diversity and quality of Métis artistic expression.

LESSON PLAN TWO: AT THE MUSEUM

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will explore the contents of a discovery box and tour exhibits in the Museum.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- Materials and information sent to you in your Museum tour confirmation package.

PROCEDURE

1. Prepare to teach and to tour the Museum by reviewing the resources listed. Divide your class into groups before the visit. Discuss the required number of groups with the Museum Programmer when you book your visit. Select other staff members or parents to lead the groups. Advise the group leaders about what they will have to do.
2. Students will visit a Western Development Museum in Moose Jaw, North Battleford, Saskatoon or Yorkton. The entire class will assemble for a welcome and orientation.
3. The class will be divided into two, three or more groups depending on the class size. Students will interact with artifacts, replicas and photographs located in a discovery box. A leader's script included in the discovery box will spearhead discussion.
4. The class will tour pertinent exhibits in the Museum using a tour handout to guide their exploration. This handout may be a question-and-answer sheet or a scavenger hunt. A tour script for the group leader will be sent with confirmation of your Museum tour booking.



The first Métis in Saskatchewan were hunters, traders and ranchers who farmed to supplement their income. In the *Métis Farming in Saskatchewan* discovery box students will examine artifacts and discuss why Métis reacted to the new government land survey system. Students will analyze information from the 1885 Resistance to the 20th century, exploring the lives of landed and landless Métis in Saskatchewan.



LESSON PLAN THREE: WHEN A MUSEUM VISIT ISN'T POSSIBLE

LESSON OVERVIEW

The development of Métis farm colonies will be explored to give students a sense that this story happened to real people not very long ago. There are people alive today who remember the farm colonies.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- “Métis Farms” by Darren R. Prefontaine is available online in *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* at http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/metis_farms.html.
- Fast Facts at the end of this resource package
- *Métis Farmers*, by Todd Paquin, Patrick Young and Darren Prefontaine, 2003, *Métis Land Rights and Self-Government*, by Leah Dorion and Darren Prefontaine, 2003, and *Saskatchewan Métis Fact Sheet*, by Leah Dorion, 2003 on the Gabriel Dumont Institute’s *The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture* at <http://www.metismuseum.ca>
- Barron, Laurie F. “The CCF and the Development of Métis Colonies in Southern Saskatchewan During the Premiership of T.C. Douglas, 1944-1961,” in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1990. This article is available online at <http://www.brandonu.ca/library/cjns/10.2/default.htm> or <http://www.wdm.ca/skteacherguide/>.



Métis and horse-drawn binder during harvest, circa 1910. Saskatchewan Archives Board S-B9117

PROCEDURE

1. Prepare to teach by reading the articles listed.
2. Teach the students about the Canadian government’s Métis farm colony initiative.
3. Ask students to consider what they know about Saskatchewan in the 1930s and 1940s. Direct the discussion to consider the motivations of the Canadian government for establishing farm colonies.
4. Have students reflect on the injustices and inequities of the farm colony experiments. Ask them to define or describe one farm colony experiment, summarize its implementation and the results on the lives of Métis people. Ask them to state their opinion on whether these colonies upheld or infringed on the rights of Métis people as citizens of Canada, giving supporting arguments for their opinion.



ADAPTATION AND EXTENSION

1. These experiences would be powerfully told in the words of someone who lived them. If possible, recruit a Métis Elder with experience of farm colony life. Ask the Elder to share his or her experiences and feelings. Ask student to share their reactions with the Elder. For protocol when inviting an Elder to visit, check www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/docs/native10/F_L_Objectives.html#IE.
2. Have students journal or write a fictitious account of a Métis farm family. Have students draw, sculpt, or craft a farm tool or machine model.
3. In class, or at home, have students prepare foods from Saskatchewan-grown ingredients, explaining their choices of ingredients.

LESSON PLAN FOUR: CLASSROOM WRAP-UP

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will learn about the “road allowance people” and analyze the long-term effects of the farm colony projects. They will gain an understanding of the agricultural land base in Saskatchewan and the percentage owned and farmed by Métis.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- “The Road Allowance People,” by Darren Prefontaine in *Métis Land Rights and Self-Government* by Leah Dorion, with Darren Prefontaine, 2003, pages 15-18. This essay is available on the GDI’s *The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture* at <http://www.metismuseum.ca>.
- Barron, Laurie F. “The CCF and the Development of Métis Colonies in Southern Saskatchewan During the Premiership of T.C. Douglas, 1944-1961,” in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1990. This article is available online at <http://www.brandonu.ca/library/cjns/10.2/default.htm> or <http://www.wdm.ca/skteacherguide/>.
- GDI papers from *The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture* recommended in Lesson Plan One
- Borrow *The Story of the Crescent Lake Métis: Our Life on the Road Allowance*, narrated and produced by Leah Dorion-Paquin, from the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation library in Saskatoon at 306-373-1660. It is also available to purchase for \$10.00 from the *Gabriel Dumont Institute* in Saskatoon, telephone 306-934-4941 or visit <http://www.gdins.org>.



Grain storage shed at the Métis Farm at Lebreton, circa 1963. Saskatchewan Archives Board 63-271-02



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PROCEDURE

1. Prepare to teach by reading the recommended articles and previewing the film *The Story of the Crescent Lake Métis: Our Life on the Road Allowance*.
2. Introduce the topic of “road allowance people.”
3. Watch *The Story of the Crescent Lake Métis: Our Life on the Road Allowance*, which tells a story of dispossession, relocation, and survival. The film is 50 minutes.
4. In following class time, discuss the film.
5. Discuss the situation today.
6. Study a recent road map of Saskatchewan. Look at the Métis communities in Saskatchewan today. Study the communities in the north, in the parkland and in the south.

ADAPTATION AND EXTENSION

1. Various subjects can be connected to the study of farming. Geography and mathematics can be exercised through map skills and area calculations. English and composition can be enhanced through writing assignments. Connections can be made to art, cooking, graphic arts, drama and music. Science can be connected through studies in environment, geology and plant biology.
2. To provide an opportunity to evaluate student understanding, ask students to write a poem or a ballad that presents a concept dealing with farming. Consider asking students to juxtapose conditions for a Métis farm family against conditions for a non-Aboriginal family as a way of assessing their understanding of the two past realities.



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RESOURCES

- *The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture* from the Gabriel Dumont Institute: <http://www.metismuseum.ca>.
- *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2005.
The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan is now available online at <http://www.esask.ca>.
- First Nations and Métis Relations, Government of Saskatchewan: http://www.fnmr.gov.sk.ca/html/community/metishist_intro.htm.
- Métis Nation - Saskatchewan: <http://www.metisnation-sask.com>.
- Michif and Métis Cultural Site: http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/creelang/index.html.
- *Saskatchewan Settlement Experience* website: <http://www.sasksettlement.com>.
- Barron, Laurie F. "The CCF and the Development of Métis Colonies in Southern Saskatchewan During the Premiership of T.C. Douglas, 1944-1961," in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1990. This article is available online at <http://www.brandonu.ca/library/cjns/10.2/default.htm>.
- *In A Class of Their Own: A Study of Treaty Ten Métis Scrip Speculators, Northern Saskatchewan, 1906-1912*, from the University of Alberta, School of Native Studies, 2000.
- "The Free People - Otipemistwak," in *Batoche Saskatchewan 1870-1930*, National Historic Parks and Sites Canada, 1990.
- Barron, Laurie F. *Walking in Indian Moccasins*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997.
- Campbell, Maria. *Stories of the Road Allowance People*. Penticton, British Columbia: Theytus Books Ltd., 1994.
- Waiser, Bill. *Saskatchewan: A New History*. Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 2005.
- *Atlas of Saskatchewan*. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1999.
- *The Story of the Crescent Lake Métis: Our Life on the Road Allowance*, narrated and produced by Leah Dorion-Paquin, is available to purchase for \$10.00 from the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatoon, telephone 306-934-4941 or visit <http://www.gdins.org>.
- Office of the Treaty Commissioner *Teaching Treaties in the Classroom* education kit in your school library.



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FAST FACTS

- The Métis are a nation of distinct Aboriginal people, the result of two peoples coming together.
- The fur trade provided the first contact between European, French Canadians and First Nations people. The fur trade was a reciprocal relationship. First Nations were affected and influenced by the fur traders and the traders were influenced by First Nations. Contact with Europeans resulted in major changes in the lives of First Nations.
- Marriages occurred between First Nations women and fur traders. Marriage to a trader ensured the trader a constant supply of furs, and ensured the woman's family had a constant market for their furs.
- Marriages between First Nations women and fur traders resulted in an entirely new group of people, the Métis, known as "children of the fur trade," "Michif," or "gens du libre." On the prairies, Métis were known as Flower Beadwork People - a tribute to their penchant for brightly adorned flower beadwork clothing.
- It was only in the West where the crystallization of a unique Métis identity and nationhood occurred. The Métis were a diverse group. This diversity existed between the French and English mixed-blood people in terms of religion, language, dress and livelihood.
- Michif is a distinctly Métis language based on a mixture of Cree or Ojibway and French with a distinct grammar, syntax, and lexicon.
- Scrip was a government issued certificate that gave Métis people land or money in exchange for Aboriginal title, however, it was often speculators or bankers – not the Métis – who were the real beneficiaries of the land grants.
- Road allowances were lands set aside by the government for the development of roads. Many dispossessed Métis lived on these allowances when they were pushed off their traditional lands, becoming known as the "road allowance people."
- Established in 1774 by the Hudson's Bay Company's Samuel Hearne, Cumberland House is the oldest Métis community in Saskatchewan.
- Some Métis wintered in the region of present day Saskatoon; Métis buffalo hunters and Métis traders wintered at Willow Bunch.
- In the early 1880s, many Métis families farmed riverlots near Prince Albert.
- During the late 1800s as the buffalo herds disappeared, southern Métis turned to collecting buffalo bones and working on the railway to make a living.
- La Loche in present-day Saskatchewan is a Métis community.
- Many Métis today live in La Ronge and other northern communities such as Buffalo Narrows.



APPENDIX ONE

Métis Farming in Saskatchewan

Although historically the Métis are probably best known for their skill as buffalo hunters, did you know that it was Métis people farming river lots near present-day Prince Albert who were the first to cultivate wheat in what is now Saskatchewan? Farming was important to the Métis because it supplemented the income they derived from their primary occupations as hunters, labourers, and ranchers.

For many Métis people though, farming the land was impossible, simply because they had no land to farm. Thousands of Métis people had been dispossessed of their land due to the failure of the scrip system. When opening the West for settlement, the government decided to deal with Métis Aboriginal title to the land through the issuance of scrip certificates, redeemable in either cash or land. Unfortunately, delays, inefficiencies, outright scams, and widespread land speculation often robbed the Métis of their scrip, leaving them landless. They became squatters, living on land that they did not own, building their tarpaper shack homes upon Crown lands and road allowances, resulting in their becoming derisively known as the “Road Allowance People.”

In an attempt to address the poverty and desperate plight of the Métis, the provincial government decided to establish Métis farm colonies where leased land, equipment, and instruction would be provided, in hopes of integrating the Métis into the agricultural community. By the late 1940s colonies could be found at Crooked Lake, Willow Bunch, Glen Mary, Green Lake, Baljennie, and Lebret. Métis families or entire Métis communities were relocated to the colonies, and in some cases, their road allowance homes were burned, the message being: “Do not return.” The farm colonies were ultimately deemed a failure and eventually phased out.

Together, the failure of the scrip system and initiatives such as the farming colonies have contributed to the lack of Métis agricultural development in Saskatchewan.



APPENDIX TWO

Riverlot System and Scrip

Farming was part of traditional Métis life. Métis riverlot farms were long narrow ribbons of land extending back from the banks of rivers. Riverlots were ideal in that they provided a water supply, pasture for hay, and timber for building materials and winter fuel. The farms were located side by side with a trail running through to link families and neighbours.

The Canadian government surveyed the southern part of the province into square sections and ignored Métis petitions to guarantee their river lot system in the Batoche region. Alarmed, the Métis people, led by Louis Riel, formed a provisional government at Batoche in 1885 to defend their land claims. The government responded by sending troops, led by General Middleton, to put down the Métis resistance at Batoche. In the aftermath, the Métis were given scrip – certificates which entitled them to either land or money.

The scrip system was introduced by the federal government to extinguish Métis Aboriginal title to the land so that settlement could proceed. Scrip was a government-issued certificate that entitled the bearer to either land or money. At one point, scrip amounted to 160 acres or \$160.00.

Scrip commissions travelled to Métis communities to take applications for scrip. But some Métis could not or did not read the commission's advertisements, and others were away trapping or fishing when scrip commissioners came around. Thus, many Métis were missed and did not receive scrip. Often scrip commissions overlooked entire Métis communities.

Scrip was issued for the square plots of land of the Dominion Land survey system, not the familiar river lots of the Métis. Since the square plots were located far from family and friends, or because the land was marginal with no access to water or timber, Métis people felt they had no choice but to sell their scrip certificates.

Speculators bought Métis scrip for small amounts of money, reselling it for many times its original value. Many Métis also had their names forged, and scrip was traded in their names without their knowledge. Most scrip passed into the hands of speculators. Speculators purchased and profited from the sale of Métis scrip. Nearly 85% of Métis money scrip ended up in the hands of speculators. "Out of 138,320 acres of Métis land scrip in northwest Saskatchewan, only 1% actually went to Métis claimants." (Dorion and Prefontaine at www.metismuseum.ca) They were left landless and destitute. Many Métis ended up living in shacks on road allowances. Some worked as farm labourers, picking stones, clearing tree stumps, or stooking wheat in the fall. Others hired on as ranch hands to work with cattle and horses. Many dug and sold seneca root which was used in a remedy for respiratory problems.