



BC Métis
FEDERATION

Pacific Northwest Métis Knowledge Partnership Project

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About the BC Métis Federation

BC Métis Federation (BCMF) is a non-profit association that works with Métis communities to ensure the well-being of members and is governed by a Board of Directors. The BCMF became incorporated in June of 2011. Through grassroots efforts, our organization advocates on behalf of its many members who live throughout the province. Our organization continues to build relationships with the Métis community and service delivery organizations in British Columbia that want to work together for the betterment of the Métis people. Our organization has an operational staff to oversee a variety of projects and programs for their members and utilizes contractors to fill knowledge gaps or temporarily increase the capacity needed for a specific project. Our main organizational priorities for the next 3 years include rights and recognition, cultural revitalization, member and community support, and capacity development.

Introduction & Acknowledgement

The Pacific Northwest Métis Knowledge Partnership Project came about as the result of a phone call between the Director of Research and James Borkowski of the Archdiocese of Vancouver, and a follow up lunch meeting between BCMF and members of the grant committee, a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous volunteers that are committed to healing and reconciliation. BCMF learned about the opportunities to fund research work through the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund, and they submitted a proposal.

We wish to thank Kevin Barlow and Solange Legal for taking the time to work with the BCMF operational team to submit a fundable proposal and connect the team to a Catholic archivist to help create clear outcomes, leading to an approved proposal.

Brief Description of the Project

Métis peoples and communities across the Pacific Northwest have a shared history with the Catholic Church. Many mixed-ancestry individuals actively practiced the faith and were supported in their communities by priests who looked out for their spiritual welfare. In many cases, the local parish or church was the epicentre of Métis communities. Because of this interaction and the Catholic church's reporting mechanisms, the Archdiocese of Vancouver holds vital records of Métis lived-experience in the Pacific Northwest, especially in the early 19th century. In particular, the records of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) contain important information that will help us recover our lost history.

After an extended conversation with archivist and consultant Carey Pallister, there was no doubt that Métis people throughout the Pacific Northwest were referenced in the Catholic church's sacramental records (St. Mary's and St. Peter's). It follows that the OMI's textual records would also be a rich source of information, including those created by Father Lacombe, Father Pandosy, Father Demers, Father De Smet, Father Nobili, and Father Blanchet. While many of these records are spread out across various archives in British Columbia, Alberta, Washington State, Oregon, and Missouri, our initial focus will be the Oblate collection held at the BC Archives in Victoria, British Columbia.

Our project plan was to facilitate research in this collection for four of our community-based researchers that would include a research primer, travel to and from Victoria, time in the archives, and on-site research support. As well, the process supported followup activities such as gathering feedback loops and publishing research updates.

The Need for this Research

Self-determining Métis peoples and communities have been a consistent, persistent, and integral part of the history and memory of the Pacific Northwest (PNW). The presence of “halfbreed” or “mixed-ancestry” peoples and communities, the result of the coming together of two historically distinct cultures and societies, both in the PNW and diaspora from outside of the region, is evident in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of the region and the province. Members of the Catholic church were participants in and keen observers of this history and often recorded the lived-experience of self-determining Métis communities that existed from the early-19th century to the early-20th century.

Sadly, much of this mixed-ancestry history and memory has been lost or forgotten. Within the later colonial and early provincial period, there was a systemic denial of Métis historical reality, which included informal erasure of mixed-ancestry people’s contributions to the pre-colonial and post-colonial era and formal discrimination that prohibited their full participation in an evolving social order. The exclusion of “halfbreed” peoples from the political, economic, social, and cultural life of First Nations and Euro-Canadian lifeworlds, including denial of existing and ongoing land, resource, cultural, and linguistic rights, effectively marginalized Métis communities within BC. And the international border increasingly severed kinship ties and a regional sense of collective belonging. Faced with systemic discrimination, racism and prejudice Métis peoples responded and adapted their lived-experience in a variety of ways, including but not limited to hiding or denying their mixed-ancestry, fitting in with the new economic and social order, and avoiding state censure and control to maintain their lifeway. Métis peoples and self-determining communities continued to exist but became “invisible” to the traditional historical “eye” and unindexable to the mainstream economy. Nevertheless, Métis agency was not inconsequential, nor can it be ignored. It exists and can be recovered from the historical and archival records created and held by the Catholic church.

Community-based Research & Partnerships

At BCMF, we have been conducting community based research and a robust Indigenous Research Methodology for over four years. We are developing capacity into local researchers and empowering and equipping our local Métis people in communities to do their own research, on their own behalf. This is transformative and is an act of self determination. Here is a link to our research team on our Métis in BC website:

[MetisInBC.ca/research-team](https://metisinbc.ca/research-team)

In the outdated extractive colonial research model, research has mostly been done “on” or “for” indigenous peoples and has benefited others. As part of resurgence, indigenous people throughout the world, including Métis in their local communities within BC, seek to access, control and benefit from their own knowledge. The colonial approach to research is being challenged and decolonized by a new generation of indigenous leadership.

The basic idea we support is that research is really about growing existing relationships and repatriating lost kinship networks! To accomplish our decolonizing objectives, the BCMF has employed a community-based research model (premised upon Indigenous Research Methodology) that builds capacity within each community so that its members, and not just experts or trained professionals, can utilize GIS applications or other tools like surveys and inventories to understand and manage their own information gathering, data analysis and sharing. The BCMF has established a community based approach in past and current project work within knowledge partnerships that lay the foundation for this proposed project. Our BCMF motto is that “research is relationship!” In this we seek to renew kinship networks, rejuvenate storytelling and protocols, and revitalize the cultural traditions, history and memory of Métis communities throughout the Pacific Northwest.

In our research and the relationships that are formed, each community will shape their participation in the design and implementation of projects. They will refer local champions to participate and through feedback loops, help shape the goals and priorities to focus on. Ongoing feedback loops and relationality will inform the activities that are developed and delivered, in ways that reflect each local community's uniqueness and preferences. When engaging people and communities about research as a relational process, stories increasingly become important sources. It is elders and knowledge keepers who possess and vet their stories. The knowledge must be accountable to the local community and reflect what is right for them!

Implementing Our Plan

The work plan was centred around two major activities: research seminars that would include presentations on Catholic history in the Pacific Northwest and on Archival Research Techniques for Catholic Records. As well, the project plan supported pre-planning and support for a major trip to the Royal BC Museum archives in Victoria by the research operational team and four community-based researchers from Fort Nelson, Kelowna, Clearwater, and Terrace who were already engaged in an existing research relationship. As well, the process supported followup activities such as gathering feedback loops and publishing research updates.

The team reached out to Catholic archivist Carey Pallister and discussed a potential opportunity for Carey to share her expertise and knowledge with our local community researchers and research team. As part of the process of developing our proposal, the Director of Research and Academic lead had already met with Carey and we began a conversation about Métis people. When the project was approved, the team met again with Carey and she agreed to present two interactive research primer seminars with our local researchers and operational team members!

Carey Pallister's Biography

Carey Pallister's passion for history, art, genealogy, architecture, and research began long before her career as an archivist. With nearly 40 years of experience, Carey has worked in military, municipal, religious, and school archives. From 2010 to 2022, she served as the school archivist for the Sisters of St. Ann. In 2022, Carey launched her own archival consulting business, specializing in enhancing access to records within Catholic dioceses in British Columbia. She currently holds contracts with the Archdiocese of Vancouver, the Diocese of Victoria, and the Diocese of Kamloops. Beyond her dedication to preserving history and sharing knowledge, Carey has co-authored a book on BC architects and architecture and published numerous articles on the history of Victoria. When not archiving, she enjoys creating art across various media and assisting others with historical and genealogical research.

Catholic Research Seminars

The BCMF team and Carey Pallister planned and implemented two seminars.

The first seminar was presented on December 10, 2024 with the BCMF team and local researchers. Here is the description of the seminar:

- 1. Catholic history in the Pacific Northwest** — This seminar will focus on a timeline of important historical Catholic dates, people and events, as well as historical engagement with Indigenous peoples (including Métis) and other relevant information.

"Thank you to Carey for working to break down our barriers of access!" — Cindy Wilgosh

The second seminar was presented by Carey on February 11, 2025. Here is the description of the second seminar:

- 2. Catholic Archives: Research Practices & Techniques** — Understanding the current research landscape: What, where and how are Catholic records organized? Where can researchers access indigenous archival records and oral histories? This seminar will focus on online and on-site techniques with some practical examples and demonstrations that prepare researchers to access places like the Royal BC Museum and Archive.

Both seminars were a resounding success! Strong relationships were formed between the BCMF research department, the community based researchers and Carey. It became obvious that Carey would be a strong ally to our team and to Métis people in this province going forward.

The team gathered feedback from the team and released a news release on February 18, entitled, “BCMF Research Department Empowers Local Researchers Through History and Archives Seminars” Here is the text from the news release:

The BCMF Research Department recently hosted two powerful and successful seminars focused on Catholic history and archives, empowering local Métis researchers to research their rich history and memory.

Catholic archivist Carey Pallister led these engaging sessions, shedding light on both the Catholic history of the Pacific Northwest and the practicalities and techniques of Catholic archival research. Local Métis researchers, who had recently travelled to the BC Archives to explore Catholic records, actively shared their experiences, challenges, and successes from a community perspective.

“Many thanks to Carey for working to break down barriers of access and for building relationships with our team of local Métis researchers,” said Joe Desjarlais, Director of Research. “We are empowering and equipping local Métis people in communities to do their own research, to thrive in these spaces, and this is groundbreaking!” This initiative marks a step forward in reclaiming and celebrating Métis history and memory across the Pacific Northwest, putting the power into the hands of the community.

Here is the link to the social media release:

BCMetis.com/news/bcmf-research-department-empowers-local-researchers-through-history-and-archives-seminars/

Royal BC Museum & Archive Site Visit

Another important activity involved collaborating with our researchers and the archival team from the Royal BC Museum and Archive for a site visit. The BCMF operational team met October 10 of last year with Elisabeth Bassett from the Royal BC Museum (RBCM) archival staff to discuss planning for BCMF visit to the BC Archive in January of 2025. Elisabeth works with Indigenous communities to ensure successful visits.

"This is a dream come true coming to the archives." — Diann Kehler

The team created a research plan, a research agreement to access Catholic records. Through this process we considered how we can work together to make the archives accessible to our local community based researchers, translating their community knowledge to accessing the archives. This research applies not just to Oblate but also for general records

"The archival team at the BC Archives has done a lot of work to make our trip successful." — Bruce Shelvey

The researchers had an amazing trip to the archives on January 16 and 17, 2025. This was an impactful few days of discovery and relationship building and we all experienced the archives together as a team! Many thanks to Elisabeth and Jacob and other staff from the archive who ensured a successful visit, and who worked with Bruce beforehand to prepare an amazing research plan and to assist each of us once in the archive!

"It was an emotional experience." — Rosanne Forget

After the first full day in the archives, the team and researchers met for a dinner including Elisabeth and Catholic archivist Carey Pallister to strengthen relationships! We often say that 'research happens at the speed of relationship building' and we saw this in action. The experience made research real to the researchers! After the visit there was much reflection and people posted thoughts, memories and key findings on our portal.

Some of the feedback included:

- » “We have the best working team!”
- » “It was so informative-I can’t wait to go back!”
- » “This is a dream come true coming to the archives.”
- » “It was an emotional experience.”
- » “We have such a kind, respectful and hard-working team making our shared goals to be completed in an enjoyable and productive manner.”
- » “The work in the archives was fundamental and it highlighted the need for more research in all aspects of the lives of our Métis people.”

“The connections coming from this are amazing!” — Cindy Wilgosh

As well the BCMF research team released a post entitled, “BCMF Community Researchers’ Empowering Visit to the Royal BC Museum.”

On January 16th and 17th, BCMF community researchers and their operational team visited the Royal BC Museum in Victoria.

A powerful journey of discovery and relationship building unfolded as the BCMF community researchers accessed Pacific Northwest Catholic Oblate records on their visit to the Museum. Royal BC Museum archivist Elizabeth Bassett worked with the BCMF team, supported by a detailed research plan to access Catholic Oblate records and research evidence of Métis in the Pacific Northwest.

The team experienced the archive together, and after the first day, they invited Catholic archivist Carey Pallister and Royal BC archivist Elizabeth Bassett to dinner to strengthen their relationships. Researchers directly engaged with historical documents, uncovering connections to Métis’ lived experiences in the Pacific Northwest. The visit proved transformative. The team described it as “a dream come true coming to these archives!” and that “the connections coming from this are amazing!”

Director of Research Joe Desjarlais concluded, “Many thanks to the Royal BC Museum for ensuring a successful visit and to the Archdiocese of Vancouver for their support. Our focus is grounded in local communities. The basic idea is that research is really about relationships and kinship networks! We are empowering and equipping local Métis people in communities to do their own research, on their own behalf.”

Here is the link to the social media release:

BCMetis.com/news/bcmf-community-researchers-empowering-visit-to-the-royal-bc-museum/

All of the team together made the experience so rewarding and we look forward to further visits to the archive!

"We are empowering and equipping local Métis people in communities to do their own research, to thrive in these spaces." — Joe Desjarlais

Concluding Remarks

The BCMF team wishes to thank all our Métis Community researchers: Cindy Wilgosh, Karen Prouse, Rosanne Forget and Diann Kehler who took the time to participate in this project, as well as the communities in Kelowna, Terrace, Fort Nelson and Clearwater who supported them. It's a privilege to listen and learn from those who participated! Métis people are resilient, adaptive, and proud. They have a strong, unique voice and they want to share it!

"There is history out there that needs to be revealed and honoured to reflect the beautiful people Métis are in Canada, the PNW and British Columbia." — Tanner Timothy

Finally, this could not have taken place without the funding by Indigenous Reconciliation Fund and the Diocese of Vancouver, along with the excellent support of Carey Pallister consulting.

"The work in the archives was fundamental and it highlighted the need for more research in all aspects of the lives of our Métis people." — Karen Prouse