



Métis History Cannot Be Erased for Political Convenience

BACKGROUND

British Columbia — October 28, 2026 — This backgrounder accompanies BCMF's [media release of October 28, 2026](#), responding to remarks about Métis identity made by Assembly of First Nations National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak at the First Nations–First Ministers' Meeting on October 26.

TWO CONNECTED HISTORIES

The National Chief's remarks touch on an important historical truth. For generations, colonial governments imposed categories that divided Indigenous families, restricted band membership and determined who would be recognized as Indian, Inuit, Métis or neither.

But acknowledging those injustices does not mean Métis people were created by government policy. Nor does it give any government or political organization the authority to redefine or dismiss Métis identity.

Métis identity cannot be explained simply as a product of government classification. Colonial policies and the emergence of distinct Métis communities are two different but connected histories. Both must be understood.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD

The historical record tells a far more complicated story. Métis people have a long history of community formation, political organization, land rights and self-determination across Western Canada.

- The Red River Métis helped establish Manitoba in 1870.
- Métis communities developed throughout the Prairie provinces, the northern territories and the broader western interior, through histories of kinship, trade, resistance, migration and settlement.

These histories were never entirely separate from those of First Nations. Families intermarried, communities shared territories and economies, and people maintained relationships across



identities that governments later tried to separate.

BCMF's own archival research in British Columbia illustrates this complexity. Métis people were not simply passive subjects of these policies. They exercised agency, maintained relationships, asserted distinct identities and organized politically.

TREATY 8: CANADA'S OWN RECORDS

The federal government's own Treaty 8 records make this unmistakable.

- During preparations for Treaty 8 in 1898, federal officials recognized Métis political influence and the need to address Métis Aboriginal land interests alongside treaty negotiations.
- Two commissions were established: one to negotiate treaty with First Nations, and another to address Métis claims through scrip.
- This process extended into northeastern British Columbia.

That history shows something fundamental: Canada recognized Métis interests when it sought to obtain land and extinguish Indigenous rights. Why should those histories become less visible when questions of recognition, consultation and responsibility arise today?

MÉTIS AT THE FIRST MINISTERS' TABLE

Métis leaders were addressing these very questions at Canada's highest political tables more than 40 years ago.

- **1983, First Ministers' Conference on Aboriginal Constitutional Matters.** Métis National Council representatives directly advanced claims to a Métis land base, self-government and recognition as a distinct people.
- **1984, First Ministers' Conference.** Métis leaders acknowledged that governments had historically classified people of mixed ancestry in different ways. But they also emphasized that distinct Métis communities had emerged with their own identities, while maintaining close relationships with First Nations. The proposed constitutional accord was never enacted, but it shows that Métis leaders understood this complexity more than 40 years ago.
- **2005, the Kelowna Accord.** Prime Minister Paul Martin invited Métis leadership to take part, alongside First Nations and Inuit leadership, in the First Ministers' Meeting that



produced the Kelowna Accord.

CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* expressly recognizes Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples. Specific Aboriginal rights claims require historical evidence, but the constitutional recognition of Métis as a distinct Indigenous people is not subject to political approval by others.

WHO TAKES PART IN NATIONAL RECONCILIATION DISCUSSIONS

The October 26 gathering was specifically organized for First Nations and First Ministers. First Nations deserve their own political space to advance their rights and priorities. But Métis people deserve comparable opportunities.

Canada has already set a precedent for Métis participation at the highest levels of government, in the constitutional conferences of the 1980s and at Kelowna in 2005. Why, then, is there no comparable national forum today where Métis people can engage directly with the Prime Minister and provincial and territorial leaders about their rights, land interests and futures?

That question belongs primarily to the federal government. Meaningful engagement must also respect the diversity of Métis histories, communities and representative organizations. No single organization should automatically be presumed to speak for every Métis person in Canada.

BCMF calls on Canada to establish meaningful, direct First Ministers-level engagement with Métis peoples and the representative institutions they choose.

FOLLOW THE SCRIP

BCMF's *Follow the Scrip* research adds further urgency. BCMF's investigations trace how Métis land entitlements passed through government processes, financial intermediaries and land transactions, including transactions involving valuable lands in British Columbia.

These records do not resolve every modern territorial or constitutional claim. They do, however, raise serious questions about:

- the loss of Métis land interests through the manipulation of scrip
- the role of governments and institutions in the exploitation of scrip
- the wealth that others accumulated through those scrip transactions.



This history deserves investigation and accountability, not dismissal.

RECONCILIATION WITHOUT ERASURE

Reconciliation cannot advance by diminishing the identity or rights of another Indigenous people.

BCMF respects First Nations title, rights and self-determination. Recognizing those rights does not require denying Métis history. Nor should Indigenous peoples be forced into political competition over recognition that was too often controlled by colonial governments in the first place.

The history of Métis people in Canada is complex because Indigenous history itself is complex. It is a history of interrelationships, distinct identities, political agency, dispossession and survival. Canada's future reconciliation must be informed by all of that history, and by the voices of the people who lived it.

Distinction does not require erasure. Protecting First Nations rights does not require denying Métis history.

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ABOUT BCMF

[The BC Métis Federation \(BCMF\)](#) is a non-profit association that works with Métis communities to ensure the well-being of BCMF members. Through grassroots efforts, BCMF advocates on behalf of its many members living all across the province.

MEDIA CONTACT

Keith Henry, President, BC Métis Federation

P: (778) 388-5013

E: K.Henry@BCMétis.com