

HISTORIC MÉTIS COMMUNITIES IN ONTARIO

THE HISTORIC KILLARNEY MÉTIS COMMUNITY

Based on the existing research on Métis communities in Ontario and the criteria established by the Supreme Court of Canada in *R. v. Powley* (“*Powley*”), a historic Métis community developed from the inter-connected Métis populations at Killarney and its environs (the “Historic Killarney Métis Community”).

Identifying the Historic Métis Communities in Ontario

In *Powley*, the Supreme Court of Canada held that Métis rights—protected by section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*—exist in Ontario. This case established the framework for the recognition of Métis rights.

The Métis within section 35 refers to distinctive peoples or communities who, in addition to their mixed First Nation and European ancestry, developed their own customs, way of life, and recognizable group identity separate from their forebearers.

In order for a contemporary Métis community to possess section 35 rights it must have its roots in an identifiable historic Métis community that emerged prior to the time when Europeans established effective political and legal control in the area. It is therefore crucial to identify such historic Métis communities.

Identifying a historic Metis community requires demographic evidence that the population was identified as distinctive, evidence that the community had its own collective identity, and, evidence that the community had its own shared customs, practices and traditions.

Killarney Timeline

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| 1681 | The French establish a system of permits for interior trade, launching the French fur trade with significant seasonal traffic along the waterway between Manitoulin Island and the mainland. |
| 1815-1850 | As recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada in <i>Powley</i> , the Upper Great Lakes area is largely under the control of Aboriginal communities who formed the dominant population during this period. |
| 1820 | The first identified Métis family—Etienne de Lamorandiere, Josephite Sai-sai-go-no-kwe and their children—move from Drummond Island to the area of Shebaonaning/Killarney to open an independent fur trade store. The Lamorandiere family remained in Killarney. |
| 1850 | The Robinson-Huron Treaty is signed. |
| 1871 | By this time, the population at Killarney is composed of three distinct groups—an English and Scottish group; a group of “Indians” under Chief Anaweigonce; and the largest group, numbering approximately 95 people, consisting of Métis families. Several prominent Métis families—previously identified in the record as Métis—are documented as living in the area. |

- 1870s-1890s** In the 1870s, there is an influx of new non-Aboriginal settlers, coinciding with the nearby resource boom and eventual railway access to Sudbury, which opened in 1883. This shifted the population make-up of Killarney from predominantly Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal. This population shift resulted in serious impacts to subsistence fishing resources for the Métis population, causing significant changes to the Métis way of life and leading to the institution of fishing regulations by the 1890s.
- 1891** The village of Killarney is still predominantly composed of “old Killarney” families who were either Métis or who had married into Métis families, as well as newer Métis families.
- 1901** The 1901 census for Killarney continued to show the core of the “old Killarney” population being present as six large extended Métis family groups.

Demographics

Flowing from the historical events set out above as well as the strategic location and migration of Métis families into the area, a distinctive Métis community developed at Killarney.

Killarney’s origin was in the fur trade in the 1820s. At least three known prominent Métis families maintained a persistent presence in Killarney prior to the 1870s, and the 1871 census indicated that the largest demographic in Killarney were individuals comprising Métis families.

The 1881 census shows additional Métis families as well as continued presence of the “old Killarney” founding families. The presence of the Lamorandiere family continued, and the 1901 census for Killarney also continued to show the core of the old population of six large extended Métis family groups.

Vocation and Cultural Practices

The Métis in Killarney and environs shared a number of customs, traditions, and common vocations, including:

- Independent fur trade at Killarney, separate from the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company.
- Several Métis families and individuals, including Alexander Lamorandiere, had small areas of land under cultivation and raised Indian corn, potatoes, carrots and hay, kept animals, and produced several hundred pounds of maple sugar. Most of these families also trapped small quantities of fur.
- The Métis population in Killarney exhibited other shared characteristics like language (French and possibly Ojibwe in addition to English), Roman Catholicism, and harvesting activities like fishing and maple sugaring. The first mass was celebrated in Killarney in 1836, at Etienne de Laramondiere’s home.
- There is evidence of a distinctive Métis culture with visitors in 1836 describing a gathering at the home of a Métis trader where they “danced away to the merry sound of the fiddle, with the gay and lively half-breeds.”

- There is some commonality amongst the occupations among the Métis population, transitioning from fur trade-related occupations to labouring jobs generally associated with a lower socio-economic class such as mechanic, cooper, and mail contractor.

Distinctive Collective Identity

A number of factors indicate that the Métis community at Killarney was considered distinctive from the other nearby population and communities. Historical information shows a pattern of marriages occurring between different Métis families in the region, including the Lamorandieres.

The 1857 treaty payroll for Spanish River identified 12 family heads as “HalfBreeds” or “claim through mother”. The inclusion of the Lamorandieres and Solomons on treaty paylists was controversial and the topic of investigation. Interviewees, both First Nations and others, identified them as “not Indian” or “more French than Indian”.

In 1881-82, Andrew Peters, a newcomer to Killarney, wrote to the Minister of Marine and Fisheries to complain about P.R. de Lamorandiere drawing Indian annuity. De Lamorandiere responded that the de Lamorandiere family were “never looked upon as Indians” though he did have Indian blood of which he was not ashamed.

There is evidence that, in the early 1800s, a Métis man was harassed by settlers in the area because he rigourously reported the settlers for fishing law violations. This harassment caused the “old Killarney” Métis families to band together and support him and his family.

About this Document

This summary was prepared collaboratively by the Métis Nation of Ontario (“MNO”) and the Ontario Government (“Ontario”). It is based on historical research currently available on Métis in Ontario. Many of the reports reviewed and relied on to create this summary are available online at: <http://www.metisnation.org/registry/citizenship/historicresources/>. The parties will consider additional historic information as it may become available.

Identifying historic Métis communities is a necessary part of the legal requirements for establishing Métis rights, protected by section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, however, the identification of historic Métis communities alone does not define contemporary rights-bearing Métis communities, determine who in Ontario is Métis, who holds Métis rights, or define Métis harvesting areas or territories.

This summary does not necessarily address the claims of other self-identifying Métis communities not represented by the MNO. The conclusions in this summary do not limit the potential for other historic Métis communities to be identified or the expansion of recognition historic Métis communities in the future based on additional historic research.