

## HISTORIC MÉTIS COMMUNITIES IN ONTARIO

### THE HISTORIC ABITIBI INLAND MÉTIS COMMUNITY

Based on existing research of Métis 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 the inland posts between New Post and Timiskaming, including: Frederick House, Abitibi House, Kenogamissi, Flying Post, Mattagami, and Matachewan as well as the historic Métis population at the Moose Factory Post and environs, several families of which were inter-related to members of the Historic Abitibi Inland Métis Community and migrated south to become a part of this community (collectively, the “Historic Abitibi Inland 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.

#### The Abitibi Inland Timeline

The following is a brief chronology of fur trade locations and historical events in James Bay and the Abitibi Inland areas, illustrating the movement and inter-connectedness of the Métis populations between James Bay and the Abitibi Inland:

- 1668** The English establish the first fur trading post on James Bay.
- 1670** The James Bay post led to the creation of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC); the English Crown grants a monopoly to the HBC and legal title to Rupert’s Land.
- 1673** The French build a small post called Fort La Tourette on Nighthawk Lake (near Timmins) but the post had a very limited duration. Meanwhile, the HBC builds the Moose Factory Post.
- 1679** The French build Fort Temiscamingue, creating the bookend for inland rivalry between James Bay and Lake Timiskaming.
- 1686** The French build a post at Lake Abitibi and successfully capture the English posts on James Bay.

- 1713** The captured James Bay posts are returned to the English.
- 1713-1763** There is intense competition in the Abitibi region between the English and French. Outposts were constructed by both sides to try and isolate Indian trade.
- 1763-1821** The North West Company (NWC) and the HBC engage in a rivalry between James Bay and Lake Timiskaming by establishing several more posts at Fredrick House, Abitibi, Kenogamissi, Groundhog Lake (Flying Post), and Matawamingue.
- 1788** Fort Temiscamingue is occupied by independent English traders and then by the NWC.
- 1790** Métis servants begin to appear in the Moose Factory post records.
- 1821-1890** The HBC and NWC amalgamate, with the HBC taking over the post at Fort Temiscamingue and additional posts, and opening Matachewan and New Post.
- 1901** In the 1901 census there were between 400-500 Métis individuals recorded in the James Bay and inland areas.
- 1902 / 1903** Revillons Frere Company opens a post at Moose River (now Moosonee). Provisioning the post meant that post life extended beyond the immediate environs of the post. Métis servants and their families set up temporary hunting and fishing camps at some distance from the post.
- 1905-1906** Treaty 9 is negotiated, following which railways and settlements are established in several inland locations. In 1905, several 'half-breed' families at Moose Factory petition government for scrip to be issued to them.
- 1920s-1930s** The RCMP and various government offices are established throughout the region.

## Demographics

The various inland posts in the region were small and interconnected, with frequent travel, communication, and trade between them. Despite being rivals, the posts often showed hospitality to one another out of necessity due to the harsh and isolated environment. This hospitality continued after the HBC/NWC merger of 1821.

In 1830, HBC policy provided for apprentice opportunities for young Métis men, however, these opportunities were only available in locations outside where their families lived and, if their fathers worked for the HBC, they would not be posted to the same location. These young Métis men (called 'factory boys') replaced the supply of apprentices whom the HBC had formerly brought over from England.

By the 1860s, the majority of company men at the inland posts were made up of these apprentices and/or their children. As well, Moose Factory Post employees were frequently transferred to the inland, Albany, and Lake Superior posts. Well-known Métis families—many of which are repeatedly identified as 'half-breeds' in the historic record over successive generations—stay in the inland area, and move between post locations.

For example, census records document that Métis constituted 85% of the population at Moose Factory circa 1901, many of whom lived on the post grounds. The historic record also shows there were eight prominent Métis families who lived in the Moose Factory area for between two and

four generations, and another eight family who lived in the inland area. The interconnection of Métis family names throughout the James Bay and inland region was likely caused by the expansion of the HBC, the transfer of servants between posts, as well as intermarriage. As a result, over time the Métis populations in the James Bay area became more interconnected with the inland populations around Abitibi and Timiskaming, with many individuals relocating south for employment opportunities following the collapse of the fur trade .

Within the inland region, there are three areas where there appear to have been clusters, including, specific neighbourhoods of Métis residents (with well-known surnames that were consistent with early time periods). For example, in the 1901 census, 127 Métis individuals were identified at Flying Post, 45 Métis individuals at Matagami, and 62 Métis individuals at North Timiskaming. In addition, there were 108 Métis individuals identified at Moose Factory.

### **Vocation and Cultural Practices**

The Métis in these inter-connected populations shared a number of customs, traditions, and common vocations, including:

- **Provisioning:**

Between 1821 and 1890, the records shows that many posts were provisioned by the Métis families who resided in and near them. Notably, the Métis women of the inland posts participated in hunting, snaring, fishing, and maple sugar production; making and repairing nets, gathering spruce gum for canoe repairs and to lace and repair snowshoes.

Métis servants were the primary post-provisioners through subsistence harvesting; however, at Moose Factory in the latter half of the 1800s, Métis men moved towards a more family-based lifestyle, provisioning for their family rather than the post, and became equally engaged in the agricultural pursuits of the post population.

- **Specialized Vocations:**

Métis servants were employed at specialized tasks that required skills these men had as a result of their unique culture and heritage, including working as interpreters, canoe builders, and hunters. As noted above, the Métis 'factory boys' apprentice system filled a specific niche in the early fur trade.

- **Social Class System:**

The social class system at the posts resulted in Métis men primarily occupying "servant" class positions, e.g. canoe-men, sailors, sloopers, guides, interpreters, boat-builders, carpenters, joiners, blacksmiths, coopers, or general labourers. Promotions did not usually extend beyond postmaster or clerk. Women of the Moose Factory post were also subject to the class system, demonstrated by the arrival in the 1830s of two European women who refused to socialize with the mixed ancestry "wives". This class system may have contributed to a sense of shared identity between the Métis servants.

### **Distinctive Collective Identity**

The distinctive collective identity experienced by the Historic Abitibi Inland Métis Community is observed through historic information describing residency patterns, social status and social roles, political advocacy, and self-identification.

Between 1874 and 1908, there were numerous inter-group marriages (Métis individuals marrying other Métis individuals) at the Moose Factory Post. Of the 51 marriages recorded, 36 involved at least one Métis partner and 11 were cases of Métis marrying Métis. While the majority of marriages were between people at Moose Factory, there are instances of intermarriage between Métis at Moose Factory and at nearby post communities of Michipicoten, Abitibi, and Revillons Frere Moose Post. Notably, these families are repeatedly identified as “half-breeds”—as opposed to “Indians—in the historic record for successive generations.

In 1905, a petition for scrip, signed by five well-known heads of families at Moose Factory was made to government. The petition notes that “no provision is at present made for us” because they had been refused entry into Treaty 9 by the commissioners on the grounds that these families were not living ‘the Indian mode of life.’ The petition also notes that the group understands scrip “has been granted to the half breeds of the North West Territory.” This petition is an example a self-ascribed collective identification. At least two of the men that signed the petition were related to Métis families that had roots in both the James Bay and Abitibi/Timiskaming areas.

### **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.