

THE URBAN MÉTIS OF TORONTO & YORK REGION







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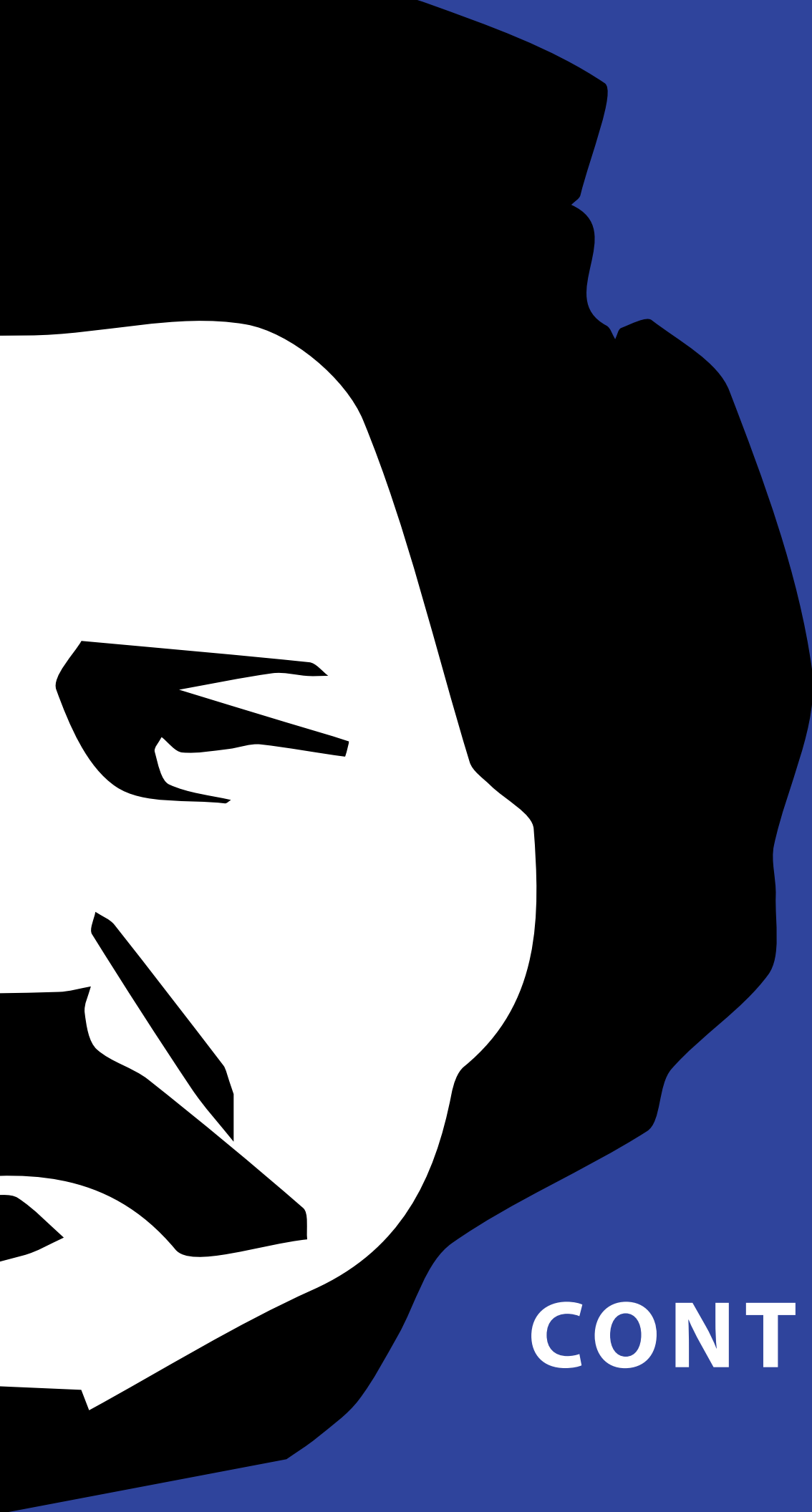
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DISCLAIMER

The Toronto & York Region Métis Council (TYRMC) owns all Traditional Knowledge and land use information contained in this report. This report does not identify the full extent of Métis land use within Toronto & York Region. It is likely that additional types of land use, valued by urban Métis, has not been captured by this project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Workshop members took part at the invitation of the TYRMC. To protect the confidentiality of those who participated, no identifying personal information associated with participants has been included in this report. Supporting audio recordings and workshop documentation have been archived by Know History, Inc. on behalf of the TYRMC.



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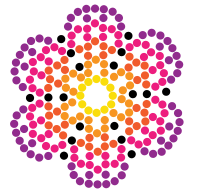
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OVERVIEW



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City Panorama Travel Skyline Urban Landscape.

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Powerlines running through Old Fort York as it is slowly absorbed into Toronto's urban landscape, 1922. LAC.

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Métis Fiddler playing at the annual MNO Canoe Expedition, 2017. MNO.

OVERVIEW

The Métis are a distinct Indigenous people with a unique history, culture, language, and territory. The Métis Nation is comprised of “the children of the fur trade”: the descendants of First Nations women and European men. While the initial offspring of these unions were of mixed ancestry, a new Indigenous people called the Métis resulted from the subsequent intermarriage among this mixed ancestry population. In Ontario, Métis settlements emerged along canoe routes that were used in the fur trade. These communities were connected by family networks, culture, occupational roles, way-of-life, and shared Métis identity.

Urban Indigenous populations are one of the fastest growing populations in Canada. The percentage of Indigenous people living in urban areas has increased from 6.7% in 1951 to 53.2% in 2006.¹ Ontario Métis are currently the most urbanized of all Indigenous populations, with nearly 70% of all Métis living in cities.² Most Métis in urban environments view their city as their home and intend to build their lives there. The Environics Institute’s *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study* found that 80% of urban Indigenous peoples had no plans to return to their communities of origin.³ It is thus crucial to understand and document Urban Métis way-of-life.

*"Crossing the city limits does not transform Aboriginal people into non-Aboriginal people; they go on being the particular kind of person they have always been."*⁴

-Royal Commission on Aboriginal People

As outlined in Ontario’s *Urban Indigenous Action Plan*, “cultural rooted indicators must be evaluated to understand urban indigenous communities.”⁵ For the Métis, these cultural roots are based in way-of-life activities and an active relationship with the natural environment. This report explores how Urban Métis in the Toronto & York Region have maintained Métis a way-of-life in Canada’s largest urban center.



Arrival of the voyageur canoes at MNO’s Annual General Assembly, 2018. MNO.



Métis Remembrance Day participation, 2017. MNO.



Métis youth attend the Annual General Assembly, 2018. MNO.

CHALLENGES TO URBAN MÉTIS



Nathan Phillips Square, 2019.
Know History.



Allan Gardens Conservatory, 2019.
Know History.

Urban Métis populations have received little attention from researchers relative to their rural counterparts. When the topic of urban indigeneity emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, Indigenous culture and urban life were viewed as incompatible.⁶ At the time, the migration of Métis people to the city was seen as a rejection of traditional culture.⁷ Today, Métis culture and urban life are not viewed mutually exclusive; however, there is still little public knowledge related to how Métis people define their cultural identities or practice way-of-life activities in urban environments.

Métis face distinct challenges to maintaining their traditional way-of-life within urban settings:

1. A physical separation from the lands and waters where traditional resources are plentiful and Métis land use typically occurs.
2. Maintaining a Métis identity in a region where the relationship between the Métis and the natural environment has been greatly altered.
3. Developing and maintaining a Métis community which is not anchored to the traditional Métis family networks typically found in historic Métis communities.

"Aboriginal peoples remain proudly different. Assimilation policies failed because Aboriginal people have the secret of cultural survival. They have an enduring sense of themselves as unique peoples with a unique heritage and the right to cultural continuity."⁸

OUR APPROACH

Know History conducted two urban mapping workshops for the Toronto & York Region Métis Council. The goals for these workshops were: (1) to assist the Toronto & York Region Métis Council in improving engagement with local Métis by providing information about their urban land use practices; (2) to document Métis perspectives on their urban land use; and (3) to provide an initial assessment of how the Toronto & York Region Métis have responded to the challenges outlined on page eight.

Know History staff gave a brief presentation explaining the goals of the project to both workshop groups. Afterwards, participants responded to a series of questions that sought to explore Métis land use and way-of-life in an urban environment:

- How do you connect with your Métis heritage in an urban setting?
- What spaces are available (e.g., gathering spaces, friendship centres, community centres)?
- Are there traditional activities that you engage in (e.g., beading, jigging, music, traditional food)?
- What events help you connect with the Métis community?

Following this discussion, participants took part in a brainstorming/mapping exercise that identified areas of urban land use. To facilitate the mapping exercise, Know History identified six urban land use categories to focus discussions. These categories are listed on page eleven and explored in detail in the next sections of this report.



Paddle the Don, 2019. TYRMC.



Métis event staff, 2019. TYRMC.

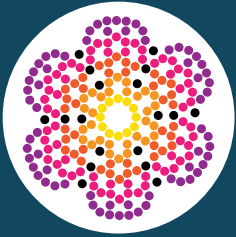
SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Urban Métis value their culture and maintain many traditional land use and way-of-life activities within Toronto & York Region. This was expressed across all six mapping categories through practices such as paddling, crafting, visiting commemorative sites, supporting Métis organizations, sustaining spiritual connections to Métis ancestors, and sharing country foods such as wild game, fish, and harvested plants. Urban Métis have also developed a variety of adaptations to overcome barriers posed by city life. This was particularly evident when mapping harvesting locations. Although some Métis travel outside of the city to fish or pick berries, many urban Métis access traditional foods through alternate means such as gardening, purchasing wild game, using extended family networks, or dining at Indigenous restaurants.

Locations do not have to be Métis-specific in order to contribute to Métis land use and way-of-life. Non-Métis public spaces, such as Nathan Phillips Square and Fort York, are valued by the local Métis community because they host Métis events and activities. Urban Métis also utilize services that are open to the wider Indigenous community. For example, Toronto's Anishnawbe Health Centre and the Native Canadian Centre were both identified as Métis spiritual, cultural, and harvesting sites. This underlines the importance of understanding how urban Métis use and interpret European and pan-Indigenous sites.

This project also demonstrated that a contemporary Métis community has formed in the Toronto & York Region despite the absence of a historic Métis community. Within this urban environment, Métis from across the Homeland have come together to form a distinct group. The urban Métis community attends cultural activities such as Paddle the Don and "Métis Rendezvous 2017," they gather to share Métis traditional knowledge and foods, and they are politically active.

Finally, this project explores how urban Métis land use can be identified and recorded. Further investigation is needed to fully understand how land use is expressed in this unique urban setting. A detailed explanation of the mapping categories, as well as an analysis of workshop results, is provided in the next sections of this report.



CULTURAL

Sites where Métis culture is practiced or shared



HARVESTING

Sites where any plant, mammal, or fish is taken for a variety of purposes



HISTORICAL

Sites that hold historical importance to Métis



TRAVEL

Routes of travel that are both historical and contemporary



SPIRITUALITY

Sites of spiritual importance or where Métis practice their spirituality



SITES OF IMPORTANCE

Sites that are important to the individual or the Métis community







S E C T I O N O N E

CULTURAL





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Métis musicians and jiggers, 2017. TYRMC.

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Drum-making workshop led by Steve Teekens, Executive Director of Na-Me-Res. 2015, TYRMC.

SECTION ONE: CULTURAL



INTRODUCTION

Métis cultural sites are defined as locations where Métis culture is practiced or shared. Local Métis reported three types of urban cultural sites: natural, such as rivers and gardens; historical, with Métis cultural connections; and event spaces, which host Métis cultural activities. While there are Métis cultural opportunities inside the Toronto & York Region, some Métis must travel outside of their immediate community to experience “cultural immersion” through events such as the MNO Annual General Assembly or Batoche Days.

CULTURAL SPACES

Urban Métis repurpose numerous non-Métis public spaces for Métis cultural activities. In Toronto, Nathan

[above]

Map featuring sites of cultural importance, 2019. Know History.

[below]

Masters Indigenous Games, 2018. TYRMC.



“La législature d’Ontario doit avoir emprunté une page de ce code. Le trésorier McKenzie offre une récompense de \$5,000 pour l’arrestation de Riel; il ne dit pas, cependant, si c’est vil ou mort qu’il veut avoir Riel, ou, encore, si la production du squelette de Riel donne à son possesseur droit au \$5,000. Il est probable que pour le dixième de cette somme, M. McKenzie aurait les têtes de tous les membres de la famille de Riel. Les hommes qui, pour quelques piastres, risquent leur vie à chasser le loup dans le Michigan et le Minnesota, s’engageraient volontiers à fournir pour \$5,000 cent chevelures de métis à M. McKenzie.....

Announcement that a bounty has been placed on the head of Louis Riel, 1872. *Le Métis*.



Opening ceremonies of MNO’s Annual General Assembly, 2018. MNO.



Raising the Métis flag at City Hall, 2016. TYRMC.

Phillips Square and Dundas Square host Métis jigging and fiddling events. Métis jiggers and musicians, such as Alyshia and Liam Bloor and the Métis Fiddler Quartet central at these community events. These public cultural displays in the heart of Toronto are meaningful as they simultaneously bring the Métis community together, spread awareness about Métis cultural practices, and affirm that Métis culture is alive and flourishing in this urban environment.

Natural spaces adapted for urban environments are also used by Urban Métis as venues for cultural activities. Allan Gardens, for example, consists of a conservatory, playground, and community gardens. Managed by the City of Toronto at no fee to its users, the location hosts pan-Indigenous events, such as talks on reconciliation and knowledge circles, with Métis participation.

The Toronto and York Region Métis Council supports some cultural activities through grant funding. “Métis Rendezvous 2017” was funded by a Community Fund for Canada’s 150th Grant via the Toronto Foundation. This event, which held at Black Creek Pioneer Village, was a public celebration of the Métis people and their contributions to the establishment of Canada. The celebration featured cultural activities such as jigging and fiddling, voyageur games, traditional foods, and knowledge circles.

Pan-Indigenous organizations such as the Native Canadian Centre, Native Child and Family Services, and the Native Women’s Resource Centre are valuable Métis cultural resources. These locations provide Urban Métis with access to traditional medicines, crafting lessons, drum circles, and talking circles. Although these services are pan-Indigenous, they provide valuable support services for Urban Métis, enable them to practice traditional way-of-life activities, and offer alternatives to some forms of harvesting-based land use.

CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT

Many Urban Métis feel a sense of cultural displacement, stemming from generations of suppression. For some, the topic is “still very emotional because [they] feel an incredible sense of cultural loss.” Participating in Métis cultural events is one avenue for Métis to reclaim lost elements of their identity.

“I found it so validating to come to cultural events, to meet people, to connect in any way and just realize that this experience is so universal for people in this period.”

Fostering a Métis cultural identity is challenging for Urban Métis in the Toronto & York Region who are geographically separated from historic Métis communities and their associated traditional family networks. The urban community is not anchored in a local historic Métis community, but is instead an amalgamation of Métis from across the Homeland. Consequently, traditional cultural practices such as kitchen parties are less likely to occur organically.

Urban Métis must also travel to experience and benefit from cultural immersion. Specific examples include traveling to the Oshawa Métis Council’s Heritage Days, the MNO Annual General Assembly, and Batoche Days. These events are “a great opportunity to be immersed in Métis culture” in a way that is difficult to achieve in the Toronto & York Region.



Sashes at Rendezvous 2017. TYRMC.



Crafts at Rendezvous 2017. TYRMC.



Music at Rendezvous 2017. TYRMC.



Art on display at Riel Day, 2014. TYRMC.



S E C T I O N T W O

HISTORICAL





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Louis Riel addresses the jury
while on trial for treason,
1885. LAC.

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A historic cannon at Fort York
National Historic Site. The
Gardner Expressway is visible
in the background, 2019.
Daniel Judge.

SECTION TWO: HISTORICAL



INTRODUCTION

Métis historical spaces include sites where historic Métis events took place, sites of Métis commemoration, and repositories of information (such as historical records or artifacts) that contribute to a better understanding of Métis history. Métis from the Toronto & York Region place significance on local historic sites that relate to the fur trade, Louis Riel, and the Riel Resistance. They also value locations where Métis artifacts are displayed and where information about Métis history can be accessed.

HISTORICAL SPACES

While there was no historic Métis community in the Toronto & York Region, numerous historic events occurred there that shaped Métis history across the Homeland. For

[above]
Map featuring sites of historical significance, 2019. Know History.

[below]
Postcard showing the site of Fort Rouille, 1920. Toronto Public Library.





The Carrying Place. Oil painting by George Agnew Reid, n.d. Government of Ontario Art Collection.

example, prisoners from the Battle of Seven Oaks were brought to York for trial, York was the site of departure and return for troops who suppressed the North-West Resistance, and a \$5,000 bounty was placed on Louis Riel's head at the Ontario Legislature in Queen's Park.



Old Fort York, Toronto. LAC.

The region is also connected to the fur trade as one terminus of the historic Carrying Place Trail. This network of rivers and portages linked Lake Ontario to the Upper Great Lakes. The contemporary Urban Métis community associates this local fur trade connection with the traditional way-of-life practiced by its Métis ancestors across the Homeland.

The sites of both Fort Rouille and Fort York have been absorbed into the Toronto & York Region's urban landscape. In 1751, Fort Rouille was constructed by the French to intercept furs before they reached British traders. The fort operated until its destruction during the Seven Years War. In the summer of 1887, a large obelisk was erected at the location, and is still standing today. This commemorative site is valued by Métis for its historical connection to the fur trade, as is Fort York. Fort York remains largely intact and continues to host historical events with Métis participation.



Old Fort York, Toronto. LAC.

UNDERREPRESENTATION OF THE MÉTIS PERSPECTIVE

The Métis historical perspective is underrepresented in the Toronto & York Region. This location is heavily associated with the history of systematic Métis suppression,



Louis Riel Day celebrations at the North-West Resistance monument in Toronto, 2016. MNO.



North-West Resistance monument at Queen's Park, 1900. Toronto Public Library.

yet Métis are continually denied a voice in how these events are commemorated in the public sphere. Many local Métis feel that the “Métis truth in Toronto has not been told.”

“History is written by the victor. Toronto was central in the expansion to the west, and the history here, of the troops going out for the Métis in the West, it’s for the Battle of Seven Oaks, the trial, the involvement of the Ontario Legislature with Riel and putting the bounty, all of those things are buried and rarely recognized”

Local historic sites acknowledging historical connections to Red River frequently reflect support for the colonial powers that oppressed the Métis Nation. For example, a monument at Queen’s Park commemorates the soldiers who fought against the Métis during the North-West Resistance. While the Métis community in the Toronto & York Region is actively trying to reclaim their history through public events such as Riel Day commemorations, more work needs to be done to provide local Métis with the opportunity to determine how these events are remembered.

The Métis of the Toronto & York Region also feel a general disappointment that most local museums rarely utilize their voice to discuss and present Métis history. Though the Bata Shoe Museum and the Canadian Textile Museum have both exhibited Métis artifacts, institutions tend to generalize the Métis experience and fail to address the Toronto & York Region’s role in forcing Métis into hiding.

Perce-neige Woman’s Outfit by artist Pascal Jaouen, 2011. Textile Museum of Canada.



Métissé Man’s Outfit by artist Pascal Jaouen, 2011. Textile Museum of Canada.





S E C T I O N T H R E E

SPIRITUALITY





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Louis Riel's grave, 2017.
Ryan David Schweitzer.

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The Beaches, 2013. Daxus.

SECTION THREE: SPIRITUALITY



INTRODUCTION

Sites of spiritual significance are defined as places where Métis practice or feel connections to their Métis spirituality. For Urban Métis, this includes a variety of organized religious sites and natural spaces. The mapped examples in this category are associated with either the natural environment or connections to Métis ancestors. Given the highly urbanized character of the Toronto & York Region, and its geographic dislocation from historic Métis communities across the Homeland, maintaining Métis spirituality in this region requires conscious effort and a willingness to accept urban adaptations.

TRADITIONAL MÉTIS SPIRITUALITY

Traditional Métis spirituality was influenced by both

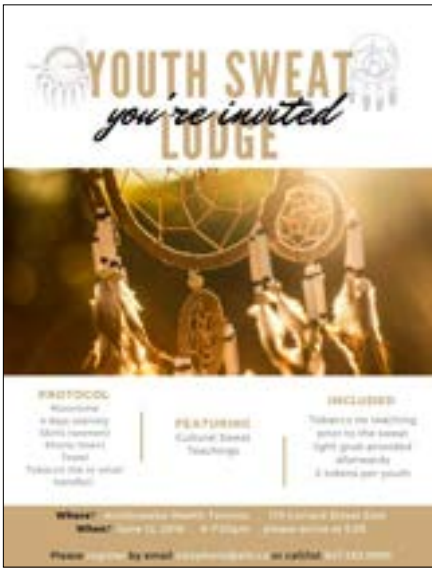
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Map featuring sites of spiritual significance, 2019. Know History.

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Interior of the church used as Louis Riel's headquarters at Batoche, 1926. LAC.





Youth Sweat Lodge invitation, 2019.
Anishnawbe Health Toronto.

First Nations and European spirituality. It was common for Métis to combine elements of Ojibwe, Cree, Catholic, and Protestant beliefs in their spiritual practices. However, traditional Métis spirituality was more than a simple combination of different customs; it was characterized by an active relationship between those First Nations and European influences. Many fur trade-era Métis attended Christian churches on a regular basis, were married by priests, baptized their children, and were buried in Christian cemeteries. At the same time, these individuals often maintained an ongoing spiritual connection to the lands and waters that were vital to their way-of-life. Traditional Métis spirituality took a holistic approach that encompassed the Métis individual, family network, community, natural world, traditional knowledge, political systems, and values. This approach continues today.



Eastern Beaches, 2017. City of Toronto

[below]

Eastern Ravine at High Park, 2009.
Alamy Ltd.



SPIRITUAL SPACES

Many Métis associate natural spaces with their spirituality. This reflects a traditional Métis worldview that links spirituality with the lands and waters that sustain way-of-life activities. Urban examples of this include Credit River and Toronto's beaches. Both locations provide the opportunity to experience a direct spiritual connection with water without needing to leave the urban environment.

Métis also value urban parks for their potential spiritual value. Toronto's High Park, which maintains over 100 acres of natural forest within its urban surroundings, provides Urban Métis with the ability to "connect to the land." One Métis couple described Wilket Creek Park as a "very special spot" and "our church." Some Urban Métis "rotate use" of natural spaces in order to experience a wider range of settings.

Established formal religious spaces, such as Christian churches and cemeteries, are also Métis spiritual sites. Many Métis are baptized at St. Ann's Church in Toronto. This church is particularly significant to the Métis community because it holds Indigenous services that incorporate Indigenous culture and symbols into the liturgy. The church also has an altar recognizing Canada's first Indigenous saint, Kateri Tekakwitha.

Urban Métis feel spiritual links to Métis across the Homeland through their shared ancestors. They maintain these links despite a geographic separation from the locations where their Métis ancestors are buried, often traveling outside of their immediate community to visit churches and cemeteries because of the "huge significance" that they hold. For example, St. Anne's Church in Penetanguishene has spiritual significance to some Urban Métis despite an intergenerational separation from the Georgian Bay Historic Métis Community. This church holds a dual identity to many Métis as both a Roman Catholic and "Métis church" where many Métis ancestors were baptized, married, and buried.

Numerous pan-Indigenous locations are utilized by Urban Métis in support of Métis spirituality. Examples of these sites include the shoreline of Lake Ontario a few blocks south of the St. Lawrence Market where sacred fires have been held; the Native Canadian Centre, which also hosts sacred fires; The Beaches neighbourhood, where sunrise ceremonies take place; and an Anishnawbe health centre where Métis can participate in sweats and access spiritual resources through elders.



St. Ann's Parish, c. 1915. Toronto Public Library.



Edwards Gardens, 1955. Toronto Public Library.



S E C T I O N F O U R

HARVESTING





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Thornccliffe Park Community Garden, 2019.
Sikander Iqbal.

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NishDish Marketeria, a pan-Indigenous restaurant
frequented by Métis in Toronto & York Region,
2019. Know History.

SECTION FOUR: HARVESTING



INTRODUCTION

Harvesting sites are locations associated with the collection of plants, fish, or mammals as an element of Métis way-of-life. These can be harvested personally, accessed through family and community networks, or purchased. While Urban Métis continue to practice many traditional harvesting methods, access to country foods, furs and medicines is supplemented through urban adaptations such as commercial farms, community gardens, and commercial markets that offer Métis goods.

HARVESTING SPACES

Métis in the Toronto & York Region grow foods and medicines such as sage, tobacco, sweetgrass, cedar, berries, vegetables, and herbs. Some “grow all

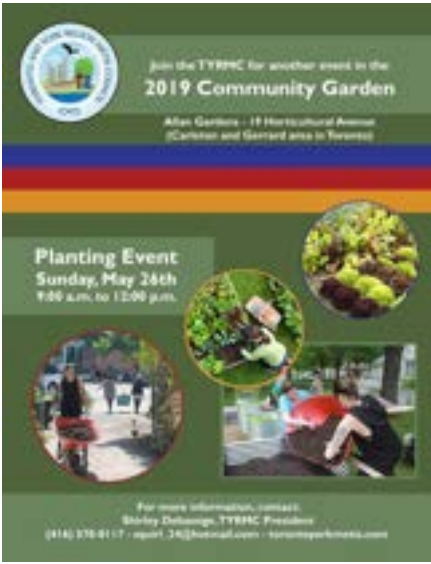
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Map featuring harvesting sites, 2019. Know History.

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Thomas Hinds Tobacconist, 2019. Know History.





Pow Wow Café, 2019. Know History.



TYRMC planting event, 2019. TYRMC.



Sharing food at a Métis event, 2018. TYRMC.

the medicines in backyards.” As an urban adaptation, others use community gardens, such as Allan Gardens, to grow and harvest these items. Others gather produce and berries at pick-your-own commercial farms like Whittamore’s Farm in Markham.

Despite being highly urbanized, the Toronto & York Region maintains natural spaces that support some of the wild plants and medicines typically associated with Métis way-of-life. Don Ravine and Todmorden Mills Park are both used for harvesting purposes. Berries and wood (including cedar and beaver shavings) are amongst the plants harvested in these locations.

Some Urban Métis travel to non-urban environments to harvest country foods. Toronto & York Region Métis hunt deer, rabbit, geese, and ducks at family farms as far away as Ingersoll. Others fish at Manitoulin Island or travel to the Midland area to pick mushrooms and leeks. Métis who travel outside of the Toronto & York Region for harvesting purposes frequently choose harvesting destinations associated with their Métis family networks. They travel to rural areas where their Métis families are or have been, indicating that harvesting helps Urban Métis maintain connections with Métis across large geographic areas. Those who do not hunt often value connections to Métis hunters who share large game, such as moose and deer.

Métis community events are another means by which Urban Métis access country foods. These events are often used to distribute meat harvested in non-urban environments to those who are unable to engage in the



Indigenous foods for sale in the Pow Wow Café, 2019. Know History.

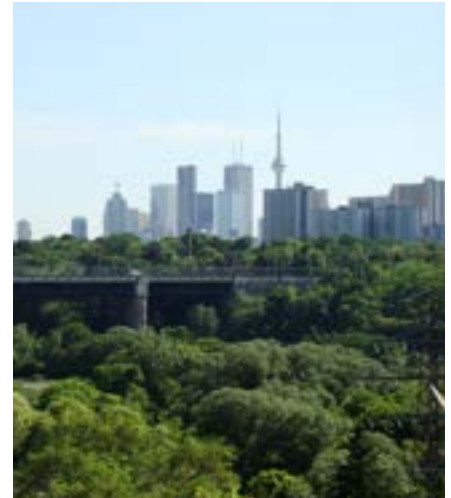
harvesting practices themselves. Meat is typically shared through a community freezer.

"It was such a privilege to get to eat elk chili... many are drawn to a lot of events because of the food."

Some Urban Métis purchase natural resources as an alternative to harvesting them directly. The St. Lawrence Market retails country foods such as venison, bison, and fish. Rabbit furs and other pelts are available in several Toronto shops. Tobacco shops such as Thomas Hinds sell tobacco for use in ceremony. Some Métis travel to a Métis-owned market in the Georgian Bay area to purchase pickerel, trout, and whitefish. Medicines such as sweetgrass, sage, cedar, and tobacco can be found at Anishnawbe health centres and the Native Canadian Centre.

"Anytime I have the chance to eat at an Indigenous restaurant, or have bannock not cooked over a fire, it's still delicious."

Métis foods are also accessed in restaurants, demonstrating how Métis have adapted their practices within the urban nature of the Toronto & York Region. Nish Dish, Tea N Bannock, the Pow Wow Café, and Kūkūm Kitchen are examples of restaurants that specialize in Indigenous foods. While living in an urbanized environment restricts direct access to wild large game, access to prepared Métis country foods is one area in which Urban Métis are advantaged over non-urban Métis.



Don Valley, 2015. MNO.



L-R: Will Skura, MNO Knowledge Keeper Virginia Barter, and Lindsay DuPré, 2016. MNO.



Planting at Allan Gardens, 2017. TYRMC.



S E C T I O N - F I V E

TRAVEL



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Aerial view of Toronto, 2015. Ben Krut.

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Evergreen Brick Works (or Don Valley Brick Works) is a valued urban greenspace within the Don Valley Park system, 2019.

Andrew Keith.



SECTION FIVE: TRAVEL



INTRODUCTION

Urban Métis identify many travel routes and methods of travel associated with Métis way-of-life. This includes both historic and contemporary canoe routes and trail systems. Urban Métis participate in travel independently in urban parks, such as High Park, and through group events like Paddle the Don. Traditional travel routes and modes of travel support Métis culture, health, and community engagement. Urban Métis in the Toronto & York Region continue to associate their Métis identity with travel, and many make concerted efforts to learn about and continue to practice traditional travel activities.

TRAVEL SPACES

The local Métis community continues to utilize and

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Map featuring travel sites and routes, 2019. Know History.

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Toronto, 1868-1923. LAC.





Schooner docked in the river at Port Credit, 1917. LAC.

value historic travel routes. Carrying Place Trail is the most prominent example of a historic travel route in the Toronto & York Region. This network of rivers and portages predates Yonge Street. It also functioned as a key fur trade-era corridor connecting the region to communities across Ontario and western Canada.

Contemporary Urban Métis also use local waterways for both individual and group travel activities. The annual Paddle the Don, which is organized by the Toronto Regional Conservation Authority, is an example of a group travel activity. The event promotes the conservation of Toronto's Don River through a group paddle down the historic waterway. Participation of Urban Métis in the event is a "collaboration" with non-Indigenous groups, such as the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. Unfortunately, Paddle the Don is the only time of year that the Don River is open for canoe-based activities. Additional personal paddle routes used by Urban Métis in the region include the Credit River, Rouge River, and around the Toronto Islands.

Canoes at the mouth of the Humber River, 2007. Bill Brooks.

Toronto & York Region's new sash, which was revealed at the 2017 Louis Riel Day celebrations, symbolizes the importance of historic travel routes and how they have been incorporated into Urban Métis way-of-life. The new sash includes three blue stripes which "represent the rivers that connect Toronto and York—the Humber, Don and Rouge." The inclusion of grey in the sash represents the concrete of "the urban city which we call home."



The juxtaposition of these natural and manmade features embodies the urban environment in which local Métis continue to practice a Métis way-of-life.

In addition to water-based travel routes, Urban Métis enjoy travel activities like hiking and snowshoeing. These activities are frequently enjoyed at the “big, huge, and urban” Rouge National Urban Park. Additionally, High Park, the Don Ravine, and Evergreen Brickworks are known for their robust systems of trails and opportunities to engage with the land without leaving the city. For many Urban Métis, use of these spaces is an intergenerational activity.

“As a kid, my mother took us to hike in High Park all the time.”

Dramatic changes to the natural environment have been occurring in the Toronto & York Region since the nineteenth century. Due to these changes, access to some traditional paddle routes is limited to particular times of the year. However, a level of continuity has been maintained between historic and contemporary Métis travel practices in the region. The number of opportunities for paddling, hiking and snowshoeing demonstrates that this highly urbanized environment is still compatible with many traditional Métis travel activities.



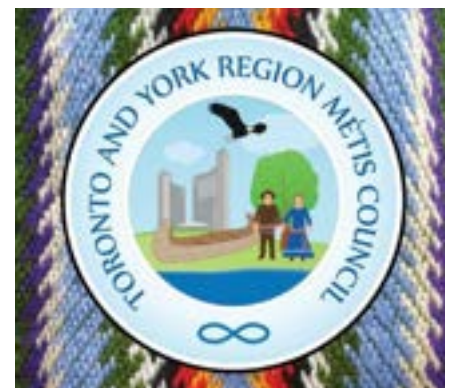
Métis participate in Paddle the Don, 2017. TYRMC.



Sashes are presented to four Métis youth, 2017. MNO.



Métis departure at Paddle the Don, 2017. TYRMC.



Toronto and York Region Métis sash, 2017. TYRMC.



S E C T I O N S I X

SITES OF IMPORTANCE



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Toronto Reference Library, 2015.
Toronto Public Library: S. Walter
Stewart Branch, one of Toronto &
York Regions repositories of Métis
books and reference materials,
2015. Toronto Public Library.

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"The Urban Angel" at St. Michael's
Hospital, 2012. George Swan.



SECTION SIX: SITES OF IMPORTANCE



INTRODUCTION

Sites of importance are locations that are significant to Urban Métis, but do not fit into another category. Addressed at the end of the mapping exercise, this category served as a catch-all for any important sites that might have been missed in the previous categories. Several data points could be moved to previous sections; however, this category has been maintained as reported to represent the thoughts and opinions of participants.

SITES OF IMPORTANCE

Sites of importance include meeting places used for purposes other than cultural activities, such as Métis and non-Métis office spaces. The meeting space rented by the Toronto & York Region Métis Council for administrative

[above]
Site of importance mapped by workshop participants, 2019. Know History.

[below]
Métis fiddle on display at Branch 10 Legion, 2015. TYRMC.





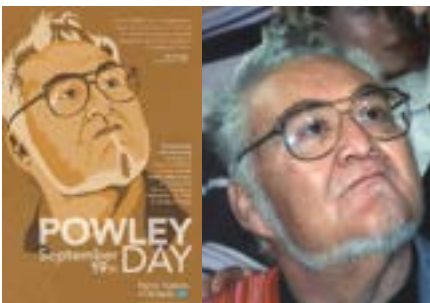
Toronto Reference Library, 2015. Ray Sonho.

purposes is associated with local Métis governance. The Métis office at York University is a rare example of an Indigenous office in a post-secondary institution that is “specifically Métis.” The Branch 10 Legion office has been described by local Métis as “our home” prior to moving regular meetings to their current location. These meeting places are important hubs that help direct MNO activities across the region.



Dr. Janet Smylie, Director of Well Living House, 2017. MNO.

This category also contains locations associated with Métis information and knowledge. Examples include the Toronto Public Library’s S. Walter Stewart Branch, the Toronto Reference Library, University of Toronto Libraries, Archives of Ontario, and St. Michael’s Hospital. Toronto & York Region’s libraries are repositories of books and reference materials used by Urban Métis to guide personal research and discover more about Métis history, identity, and way-of-life. St. Michael’s Hospital is associated with Well Living House, which serves the Métis community by combining “mainstream academic knowledge and expertise” with “Indigenous ways of knowing and doing” when providing medical services. St. Michael’s Hospital was also reported to have one of the only “Indigenous led, Indigenous demographic data collection programs” in the Toronto & York Region.



Steve Powley and Powley Day Poster, 2016. MNO.

Sites of importance are also locations that are not easily grouped. These uncategorized sites include the East



Archives of Ontario at York University, 2009. Ray Sonho.



Composer Harry Somers, 1947. Archives of Ontario.

York Civic Centre and Four Seasons Centre, the home of the Canadian Opera Company. The Toronto & York Region Métis community “lay a wreath for Métis veterans” at the East York Civic Centre. Four Seasons Centre was significant to one participant because it was the “site of the Louis Riel Opera for Canada 150,” an important event because it addresses Métis suppression.



Wreath for Métis veterans, 2015. MNO.

IMPACTS ACROSS THE HOMELAND

The Toronto-based law firm Pape Salter Teillet is seen by Urban Métis as a site of importance because “they have fought so many of our legal battles.” One of the most significant of these was the Powley Case. In 1993, Steve and Roddy Powley killed a bull moose just outside of Sault Ste Marie, Ontario. Despite harvesting the animal in their Traditional Harvesting Territory, the father and son were charged with hunting without a license and unlawful possession of a moose. The Powleys fought the charge with the aid of Pape Salter Teillet lawyer Jean Teillet, a grandniece of Louis Riel. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court which, in 2003, unanimously affirmed the Powleys’ right to hunt under Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. This decision impacted Métis across the Homeland by establishing criteria for who could qualify for Métis harvesting rights and clarifying that the Métis were a distinct people from First Nations and Inuit.



Métis veteran on Remembrance Day, 2015. MNO.





CONCLUSION

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The first Métis settlements emerged along canoe routes used in the fur trade. These Métis communities were comprised of a distinct Indigenous people with a unique history, culture, language, and territory. Métis way-of-life developed and remains rooted in a direct relationship between the Métis and the lands and waters that surround them. Although many descendants of these Métis migrated from their communities of origin to large cities during subsequent generations, Métis culture, land use, and traditions persist within urban environments. The Métis of the Toronto & York Region prove that crossing city limits has not extinguished their way-of-life.

The Métis of the Toronto & York Region sustain their Métis way-of-life by continuing to practice Métis land use activities within their urban setting. They paddle on local rivers, harvest country foods, and maintain a spiritual connection with the natural world. They proudly jig, sing, and fiddle at Métis events in the heart of Toronto, despite having parents or grandparents who often concealed their Métis identity. Regardless of their physical separation from Ontario's historic Métis communities, they gather in Métis, pan-Indigenous, and non-Indigenous venues across the region to socialize, share harvested foods, and foster personal relationships. While some activities, such as harvesting large game, cannot be practiced locally, urban Métis land use is largely consistent with rural Métis land use.

The Métis of the Toronto & York Region have developed urban adaptations to further support their Métis way-of-life. Restaurants specializing in Indigenous foods provide urban Métis with increased access to prepared game, preserves, and bannock. Medicines are also readily available and can be harvested in urban parks and community gardens or accessed through local Indigenous centres. As an additional adaptation, Métis in this region supplement their understanding of Métis history by accessing two of Canada's premier repositories of information, the Toronto Public Library and the Archives of Ontario. While the urban world has posed new challenges to the Métis, in Toronto & York Region it has proved to be largely compatible with the core features of Métis way-of-life.

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Baby picking berries, 2018.
Joanne Robbins.

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Downtown Toronto, Aerial
view, 2019. Know History.



CITATIONS

- ¹Mary Jane Norris, Stewart Clatworthy, and Evelyn Peters, “The Urbanization of Aboriginal Populations in Canada: A Half Century in Review,” in *Indigenous in the City: Contemporary Identities and Cultural Innovation*, ed. Evelyn Peters and Chris Anderson (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 33.
- ²Daniel Dumas, “Negotiating Life within the City: Social Geographies and Lived Experiences of Urban Métis Peoples in Ottawa” (MA thesis, University of Ottawa, 2017), 5.
- ³Environics Institute, *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study: Main Report* (Toronto: Environics Institute, 2010), 33.
- ⁴Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal People. *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa, 1996, 3.
- ⁵Government of Ontario, Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, Métis Nation of Ontario, and Ontario Native Women’s Association, *Urban Indigenous Action Plan* (Ontario: Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2018), 28.
- ⁶Evelyn Peters, “Emerging Themes in Academic Research in Urban Aboriginal Identities in Canada,” *Aboriginal Policy Studies* 1, no. 1 (April 2011): 78.
- ⁷Norris, Clatworthy, and Peters, “The Urbanization of Aboriginal Populations in Canada,” 33.
- ⁸Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1996), accessed May 6, 2019, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597/1100100014637>

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Don Ravine, 2010.

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Toronto Union Station showing
Front Street expansion, c.1890.
Toronto Public Library.

(back cover)
City Panorama Travel Skyline Urban
Landscape.





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