

WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE?

How would you feel if strangers claimed your neighbourhood as their own? Would you accept the situation, try to resist, or try to find a new home? In the early 1800s, more and more Aboriginal people were being displaced from their homelands, and their cultures were under threat.

DISPLACEMENT AND SETTLEMENTS

Some First Nations peoples were displaced from the United States to Canada. For example, in 1784, the Haudenosaunee Six Nations relocated from New York State to **reserves**, set-aside land, in Ontario. These reserves were given as compensation to First Nations for lands that they had lost. The British government had given First Nations lands to the United States at the end of the American Revolution.

When the Loyalists arrived, other First Nations were displaced within Canada. In some cases, the British government made land treaties with First Nations. For example, the government purchased land along the northwest shore of Lake Ontario (where the city of Toronto now stands) from the Mississauga First Nation in 1787. The Mississauga believed that they were renting the land to the government. To clarify the situation, the government negotiated a second treaty for the same land in 1805. It paid 10 shillings (about 10 cents) and set aside a small parcel of land for the Mississauga. In 2010, the unfairness of these old land transfers was acknowledged. The Canadian government paid a land claim settlement of \$145 million to the Mississauga of the New Credit First Nation, located in southern Ontario.

Examine **Figure 5.30**. It is a watercolour of the Mohawk village on the Grand River, painted by Elizabeth Simcoe in 1793. It shows the kind of settled community that First Nations people were being encouraged to live in. Mohawk leader Thayendanegea approved the settlement, believing that First Nations people would benefit by adopting European-style farming. How does this image compare with what you have learned about traditional First Nations communities?



reserve an area of land set aside for the use of a specific group of Aboriginal people

FIGURE 5.30 Elizabeth Simcoe painted *Mohawk Village on the Grand River* in 1793. Thayendanegea lived in the house with the flag. **Analyze:** What European influences can you see in this painting?



FIGURE 5.31 This 1853 painting, *Indian Sugar Camp* by Seth Eastman, shows First Nations people making maple sugar. **Analyze:** According to this painting, what steps are involved in making maple sugar?

ADAPTING TO A NEW ECONOMY

Moving into settled communities made it very difficult for First Nations people to make a living off the land, as they had in the past. Hunting, fishing, and trapping were more difficult because the communities were far away from the best hunting grounds, fishing holes, and trap lines. First Nations people tried other ways to make a living in their changing world. Some found work in towns. Others focused on selling goods such as wild rice, baskets, or maple sugar.

The Anishinaabe (a-nish-i-nah-bay) people on Manitoulin Island are made up of nations that include the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi. The Anishinaabe decided to focus on making maple sugar to earn a living. Look at the painting in **Figure 5.31**. It depicts some of the activities that were involved in making maple sugar. What challenges of making maple sugar do you see in the painting?

In 1845, a Catholic priest named Joseph-Urbain Hanipaux moved to Manitoulin Island to serve the Anishinaabe community. Read **Figure 5.32**, an excerpt from a letter that he wrote to his superiors. What injustice does Father Hanipaux describe?

FIGURE 5.32 This excerpt is from a letter written by Hanipaux to his superiors in 1846. **Analyze:** According to Hanipaux, what challenges did First Nations people face in trying to earn a living from maple sugar?

“Our native people have been busy in the woods making maple sugar.... The merchants with whom they deal claim, it is true, to buy the sugar from them at eight or nine cents a pound. But when it comes to paying them, instead of money they give them fabrics to which they attach any price they please, so that in the end the poor native receives only three or four cents for a pound of sugar.... They have had to make a great sacrifice when, to live their Catholic religion better, they came to settle in this village where they do not have any hunting.”

— Father Joseph-Urbain Hanipaux

ADAPTING TO OR RESISTING CULTURAL CHANGE

Contact between two groups can result in cultural change. Sometimes cultural change is a positive experience, whereby both groups benefit from the best that each culture has to offer. Cultural loss happens when there is an imbalance: when one group gives up aspects of its own culture to embrace another group’s culture. This is called assimilation.

Even after winning New France, the British still valued their strong military alliances with some First Nations. They needed First Nations forces to defend their colonies from any future conflict with the new American state to the south. As a result, the British tried to protect some First Nations lands.

However, the British also wanted to control First Nations populations by assimilating them. Many of the British believed that First Nations people should live in settled communities, speak English or French, and give up First Nations spiritual beliefs to practise Christianity. In Lower Canada, the Catholic Church was very active among First Nations people, teaching them the French language and Catholic beliefs. In Upper Canada, the Anglican and Methodist Churches worked to convince First Nations people to embrace a Protestant Christianity. All churches converted many First Nations people.

First Nations people were continuously being encouraged and pressured to adopt European habits and ways of life. Examine the painting in **Figure 5.33** that shows early examples of assimilation. Over many years of exposure to European culture, many First Nations people found that their connection to their own culture was weakened. What evidence of change do you see in this painting as a result of interactions with Europeans?

FIGURE 5.33 This painting, entitled *Costume of Domiciliated Indians of North America*, was created by E. Close in 1814. **Analyze:** Why does the title of the painting use the words *costume* and *domiciliated*?



THE END OF THE BEOTHUK

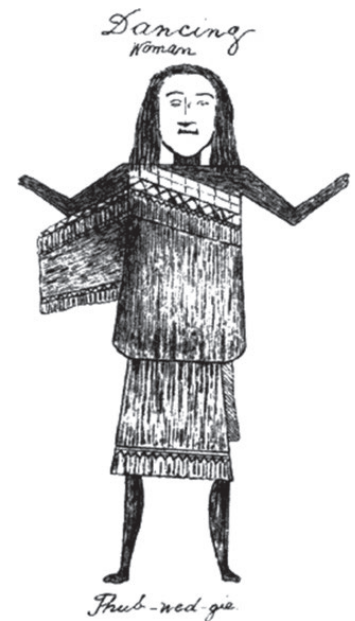
While some First Nations peoples assimilated or learned to co-exist with the Loyalist settlers, the Beothuk of Newfoundland did neither. They greatly valued their independence and traditions and did not allow anyone to interfere. The Beothuk had always relied on the river and ocean for food. When European fishers came to the island beginning about 1600, the fishers and the Beothuk did not get along. The Beothuk mostly kept their distance from the Europeans. Occasionally, they would leave furs for the European traders and then return to take the traded goods. However, often the Beothuk helped themselves to items the European fishing crews left behind in winter. The fishers viewed the Beothuk as thieves, and violence often broke out. The Beothuk fled to the interior for safety, where they began to starve because they no longer had access to their food resources from the coast.

Some Europeans tried to make alliances with the Beothuk. One of them was John Holloway, governor of Newfoundland from 1807 to 1809. Examine **Figure 5.34**. This is a reproduction of a painting requested by Governor Holloway in 1808. Holloway wanted the painting shown to the Beothuk in the hope of convincing them that the newcomer Europeans were friendly. It did not convince them. Why do you think this painting failed to convince the Beothuk to make an alliance with the Europeans?

Diseases spread among the Beothuk through changes in their diet and occasional contact with Europeans and the items they left behind. Some violence continued as the Beothuk raided settlements. Over time, the Beothuk culture and people could no longer survive. Records show that the last surviving Beothuk in Newfoundland, named Shanawdithit, died in 1829. Before her death, she drew illustrations to tell about her people, such as *Dancing Woman* in **Figure 5.35**. What makes her illustrations, such as this one, historically significant?

FIGURE 5.34 This engraving is a reproduction by John W. Hayward in 1915. He created it from the description of the picture painted for Governor Holloway in 1808. **Analyze:** What does Holloway try to communicate to the Beothuk through this image?

FIGURE 5.35 Shanawdithit drew this illustration, called *Dancing Woman*, in the 1820s. **Analyze:** According to this illustration and its title, what do you think Shanawdithit wanted others to know about her people?



Métis an Aboriginal person descended from a First Nations mother and a father of European descent

Why is it important to try to understand how the Métis thought and felt?

A NEW NATION: THE MÉTIS

While changes in the early 1800s caused hardships for many First Nations peoples, the Métis were flourishing in Western Canada, where there were few settlers. The **Métis** are an Aboriginal people with both European and First Nations ancestry. Their roots lie in the fur trade. When Canadiens (and some Scottish traders) travelled west with the fur trade, they met and formed families with First Nations women, mainly Cree, Ojibwe, or Saulteaux. The children from these relationships became known as Métis. The word Métis originally comes from the Latin word *Miscere* meaning “to mix.” It was used to describe the children of First Nations mothers and French fathers. Many of these Métis children also worked in the fur trade when they grew up.

Although these relationships had existed since the 1600s, it was not until the early 1800s that the Métis began to live together in established communities. They chose to live together because they did not feel that they were either First Nations people or European. Instead, they felt like a new people.

The early Métis communities were located near lakes and rivers on the fur trade routes, from the Great Lakes through to the Red River in Manitoba, into Saskatchewan, and toward the West Coast. The Métis farmed the land in long, narrow strips along the river, much like the Canadiens did in Lower Canada.

Examine the painting in **Figure 5.36**. It shows First Nations people, Métis, and Europeans all fishing with nets and spears through holes in the ice. How would you describe this community? The location was known as The Forks (present-day Winnipeg). On the ridge, you can see Fort Gibraltar, a key trading post in the early 1800s. The largest community of Métis families lived near the Red River, as seen in the painting.

FIGURE 5.36 Peter Rindisbacher painted *Winter Fishing on the Ice of the Assiniboine & Red River* in 1821. **Analyze:** What interactions do you see happening in this painting?



CONNECTIONS TO THE FUR TRADE

Most Métis worked at least part of the year in the fur trade. Some worked as voyageurs transporting furs and supplies, mainly by canoe for the North West Company. Since the North West Company was founded by Scottish immigrants in 1779, it had become a major player in the fur trade. The Métis navigated and translated for their Scottish employers. Other Métis made a living by supplying trading posts with fish, meat, and equipment, such as snowshoes.

An important source of income was the annual bison hunt. Every year, Métis hunters travelled westward as a community to hunt the great bison herds. Not only did the hunt provide food for their families, it was a source of income from making and selling pemmican. **Pemmican** is a food made of dried meat, animal fat, and berries that was highly valued by fur traders.

In what ways were the early 1800s a period of progress for the Métis?

pemmican a preserved food made of dried meat and berries

A GROWING SENSE OF MÉTIS IDENTITY

Over time, the Métis began to develop their own identity as a distinct people. They developed *Michif*, a language that combines words from various languages, mainly French and Cree. The Métis followed their own beliefs, combining the Catholic religion with aspects of First Nations spirituality. They also developed a distinct style of clothing. Métis men, for example, wore long hooded coats, which they bound at the waist with a long sash. They created dances, such as the Red River jig, and songs that reflected their experiences. These dances and songs are still performed today.

As the century progressed, the Métis formed political bonds as well. They stood together, as a community, to resist attacks on their rights and way of life. What does the quote in **Figure 5.37** by a Métis Elder tell you about Métis identity? Today, the Métis are recognized in Canadian law as one of the three Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

“If there was good food, there were stories, music and laughter, and from this came a richness that no amount of poverty or violence could completely take away. We were then and we continue to remain *kah tip aim soo chick*: the people who own themselves.”

— Maria Campbell, Métis Elder

FIGURE 5.37 In 2008, Métis Elder and writer Campbell explained how her people could survive challenging times. **Analyze:** What does Campbell mean when she says the Métis were “the people who own themselves”?

CHECK-IN

- HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE** Create a chart listing some of the changes that Aboriginal peoples were experiencing in the early 1800s. Beside each change, note how an Aboriginal person and a Loyalist settler might view this change. How do their perspectives reflect the time period in which they lived?
- HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE** Choose one event or development from this section. How could you use it to explain a current issue?
- GATHER AND ORGANIZE** What types of sources might help you further explore the topic of Métis and First Nations community life in the early 1800s? Where could you find these sources?