

Metis Women's Clothing¹

Metis women's clothing was somewhat subdued, usually consisting of a long skirt with a shawl or large handkerchief worn as a hood. Young women tended to wear brighter coloured shawls than did their older, married sisters, and they would often don richly embroidered or beaded leggings and moccasins. In winter both men and women would wear cloth or skin leggings. In the United States, half-leggings are known as "botas" or "botte" from the French word for a high boot.



Metis women dressed conservatively in a dark shirt or dress of calf length, moccasins and a shawl to cover the head. The women wore dark coloured, loosely fitted, waisted dresses, long sleeves, with small cuffs and of mid-calf to longer in length. Their aprons could be dark in colours, from the waist only and fairly long, or lighter in colour, embroidered and somewhat shorter with a top bib on them. The short apron was mainly used for cooking. Long dresses of calico cloth were another favourite of Metis women. Wrap-around moccasins were common and a dark coloured shawl was worn around the shoulders. Tartan shawls were also popular. Metis women wore a medium sized brooch attached to the front centre of their dress, just below the neckline. Older women were seldom seen without a crucifix hanging from around the neck.

¹ ¹ Portions reprinted from L. J. Barkwell, L. Dorion and D. Préfontaine (Eds.) *Metis Legacy: Michif Culture, Folkways and Heritage*. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications and Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2001: Chapter 6, Metis Clothing by Audreen Hourie and Lawrence Barkwell: pp. 71-83.



Photo from the Public Archives of Manitoba, Breland (Pascal) Family Collection 15, N 16374, the McPherson family at Lake of the Woods.

In his North Dakota history book Clement Lounsberry gives the following narrative on women's clothing:

The buffalo hunters were most improvident in dress and living. "In many instances," Mrs. Cavileer states, "their wives wore silk velvet, and the most costly fabric of other manufacture, even in the buffalo camp. The style of dress was a matter of much concern among the women. The waist was close fitting, with 'mutton-leg' sleeves, the folds of the round, plain skirt falling to within six inches of the ground. They wore moccasins, mostly beaded or embroidered with quills, and leggings. A graceful feature of their costume was a broadcloth blanket, thrown carelessly over their shoulders, while a line silk handkerchief was so fastened over the head and face as to display most bewitching eyes to the best

possible advantage. The hair was neatly braided and coiled at the back of the head. They had charming manners, with an oriental tinge.”²



Duck Lake Interpretive Centre, photo 228-P-74.



² Clement A. Lounsberry, *North Dakota History and People; Outlines of American History* (Volume 1). Washington: Liberty Press, 1919: 150.



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