

The Dehcho Metis

Two Metis groups are members of the Dehcho First Nations, the Fort Providence Metis Council and the Fort Simpson Metis Nation.

Fort Simpson Métis Nation

There are two distinct Métis populations in the Dehcho region. In the southern parts of Mackenzie Valley the cultural heritage of the mixed-blood people has been drawn from the French-Indian fur trade culture of the southern Prairies. It can, therefore, properly be called "Métis." In the northern part of the valley, however, a distinctive Métis society did not take root even though there were many people of mixed blood in the region.

Within Fort Simpson itself there are three main Métis families: the Sibbestons, the McPhersons and the Lafferty family. Up until the early 1950s Fort Simpson was primarily a Métis community with close to 250 Métis, 100 Dene and another 100 non-natives. Over the years many of the Métis families were forced to move away due to lack of work.

During the 1900 addition to the 1899 Treaty 11, 381 Métis claims were made by Métis in the Fort Resolution and Fort St. John areas. Out of the 381 claims made, 229 were allowed.

The Dehcho Dene were not the only ones affected by the imposition of Treaty 11, provision was made for extinguishing the aboriginal title of the mixed-blood population within the area covered by Treaty 11. However, in this case the Métis were not given a choice of land or cash.

Much of the land scrip which had been provided after the earlier treaty negotiations had found its way into the hands of speculators, and the Treaty Commissioner stated that he did not "propose to extend the difficulties and the abuses which were practiced when scrip was given out before." Scrip was therefore given in cash only, at \$240 per claimant.

In Treaty 11, 172 claims for scrip were allowed totaling \$41,280.

The history of sharp dealings by speculators while the government knowingly looked on has led the Métis of the Prairies and North to argue that their land rights have never been extinguished.

One important effect of Treaty 11 on the mixed-blood people was to create and emphasize divisions between them and the Indian population, a division which until then had been blurred. According to the treaty, Dehcho Dene were to become Treaty Indians, and the Métis were to have their rights extinguished in return for a scrip payment of \$240.

Fort Providence Metis Council

Mission Statement:

The Fort Providence Metis Council represents the interests of the Indigenous Metis/Dene Descendants of the Fort Providence area. Our members with treaty and aboriginal rights are recognized under Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution. The mandate of the Metis Council is to uphold the aboriginal rights of the Indigenous Metis/Dene Descendants, unite the membership along with promoting the history and culture of the Metis people of the area. The organization has an elected Executive and Board of Directors which provides political, economic, cultural, and social representation at the community, regional, territorial and national levels through its affiliation with other governments, corporations, and organizations.

As aboriginal people we consider our history and families to be the foundation of our destiny as we continue to work for the betterment of our future generations.

We believe in cooperative partnerships with other aboriginal organizations of similar purpose, in particular the Deh Gah Gotie Dene Council. The Fort Providence Metis Council is a member of the Deh Cho First Nations. The Fort Providence Metis maintain cultural ties with our indigenous Metis relatives who live in Northwest Metis Communities along the Mackenzie River as well as the communities around the Great Slave Lake region of the Northwest Territories.

We aspire to the objects of the Metis Declaration which was endorsed by the Dene and Metis people of the Northwest Territories in 1980.

References:

Irlbacher-Fox, Stephanie and Fort Providence Métis Council. *Since 1921: The Relationship Between Decho Métis and Canada*. Fort Providence: Fort Providence Métis Council, 2007.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute