



Artwork by George Gingras

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From the 1810s until the 1870s, **bison** were the Métis' main source of survival and income. In **Michif**, the American bison (*Bison bison*), which are commonly but incorrectly known as "**buffalo**," are called "li bufloo." The Métis used bison hides to make clothing such as hats, coats, blankets, **leggings**, and gloves. They also used the meat to feed themselves. The Métis went on two major hunts a year: one in the winter and one in the spring. The hunters were away from home for two or three months at a time. Sometimes, Métis hunting parties included as many as 2,000 people. There were two main reasons to have such large hunting parties. The first was to provide protection from rival **Aboriginal nations** such as the **Sioux (Dakota)** and the **Blackfoot (Siksika)**. The best hunting land was often fought over by various Aboriginal nations. The second reason was to have a large force to attack the herd.

The hunt occurred in military fashion. Métis bison hunts included a general and several captains who led a group of ten men, or "aen dizain" in Michif. The hunt had to be organized because the whole community relied on bison for food. **The Laws of the Hunt** provided a set of rules to guide the hunters. It ensured that nobody hunted on Sunday (the Christian **Sabbath**), it prevented stealing, and it also stopped hunters from doing anything that would hurt the hunt's success. Bison hunters rode horses known as "buffalo riders." The horses needed to run straight and maintain their speed while the hunters loaded, aimed, and shot their guns. Hunting took a great deal of skill for both the horse and rider.

Other Resources:

Barkwell, Lawrence J., L. Dorion, and A. Hourie. *Metis Legacy II: Michif Culture, Heritage, and Folkways*. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2007.

Barkwell, Lawrence J. *Veterans and Families of the 1885 Northwest Resistance*. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2011.

Pelletier, Joanne. *Métis Historical Booklet Series: Gabriel Dumont and The Buffalo Hunt; The North-West Resistance of 1885*. Regina: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 1985. (Available online at www.metismuseum.ca).

The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture (www.metismuseum.ca).

