



Artwork by George Gingras

T is for Trapper

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Canada was built on the **fur trade**. Europeans wanted fur from animals such as the beaver (*Castor canadensis*) to make hats. In **Michif**, the word for beaver is “li kaastor.” At the start of the fur trade, the **First Nations** did most of the trapping. However, the Métis, who are often called “children of the fur trade,” became skilled hunters and trappers as well. The Métis began making a living as trappers by the end of the 1700s. They sold furs to three fur trade companies: the **Hudson’s Bay Company** (HBC), the **North West Company** (NWC), and the **Fur Trade Company of America**. Dealing with competing fur trade companies was good for Métis trappers because they could sell their furs to the highest bidder. Good prices for fur ended in 1821 when the HBC and the NWC merged. Having only one fur trade company to trade with meant lower fur prices. In Europe, people no longer wanted beaver hats after the 1830s, which meant that beaver prices continued to drop in the mid 1800s. Prices also dropped for the furs of other animals. Many Métis trappers had to do other things to support their families.

Today, Métis in the northern parts of the Prairie Provinces and the Northwest Territories continue to trap. In the 1980s, many countries boycotted Canada’s fur industry. This action made it hard for Métis trappers to make a living. In the past few years, however, fur prices have actually risen. The Métis continue to honour the tradition of Métis trappers by holding annual “**King Trapper**” events.

Other Resources:

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

Pelletier, Joanne. *Métis Historical Booklet Series: The Bison Hunt and The Skirmish at Seven Oaks*. Regina: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 1985. (Available online at www.metismuseum.ca).

Troupe, Cheryl. *Expressing Our Heritage: Métis Artistic Designs*. Study Prints and Teachers’ Manual. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2002.

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

