

Dressing Under Pressure: Métis in *kistapinânihk*, 1862-1900

by

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## Abstract

Métis forms of beadwork and dress persisted in the Saskatchewan Valley between the years of 1862 and 1900, even in the midst of divisive and traumatic circumstances. Métis moved within their kinship networks to join the Isbister Settlement and other settlements along the North and South Branches of the Saskatchewan River in *kistapinânihk* (“the great meeting place,” also known as Prince Albert) after 1862. Soon many more, dispossessed from their homes at Red River in the aftermath of the Riel Rebellion of 1869-70, flocked to live among family and friends in the Saskatchewan Valley. After the signing of Treaty 6 in 1876, the 1885 Resistance, and the federal government’s subsequent violent retribution for the Resistance, First Nations and Métis families connected to *kistapinânihk* were split between treaty and non-treaty, and under surveillance. Add to that the failure of the federal scrip system, the extinction of buffalo, and the outlaw of key ceremonial elements, and it becomes clear that Métis and First Nations had become increasingly oppressed in a short period of time. Despite the gravity of these events, there is not only a remarkable absence of scholarship on how these events effected Métis material culture production, but also an absence of accession data linking material culture artifacts held in museum collections to Métis of *kistapinânihk* in this era. I seek to address this twofold knowledge gap firstly by using a reflexive approach to explore the complex kinship network between First Nations and Métis in *kistapinânihk*, including the relationships of my own ancestors James Isbister (1833-1915) and Margaret Bear (1842-1895), known as the first Métis family to grow wheat in the area. I assert that further exploration of cultural connections between Indigenous people groups is necessary for both tracing Métis migration and material culture, and establishes an approach to Métis studies through a relational, community-minded epistemology. Secondly, I examine photos from my family’s collection as well as the Narcisse-Omer Côté collection of 153 photographs from the 1900 Northwest Scrip Commission, and a tablecloth of the era beaded by Métis artist Harriet Ann McKay in Prince Albert. Examining these documents of Métis material culture between 1862 and 1900, I argue that resistance to cultural assimilation persisted in the wake of 1885, with shared elements of material culture between both First Nations and Métis kin, and cultural continuity along long-established fur trade routes such as the North Saskatchewan River, Carlton Trail, and Green Lake Trail into 1900. The historic role of *kistapinânihk* as a key point of trade between diverse peoples in all directions makes it especially suited to discussions of identity, intermarriage, and material culture exchange, especially in the midst of events rife with pressure.



## **Preface**

This thesis is an original work by Lindsay Sorell. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Following Community, Finding Beads”, No. Pro00103293, 19 Jan 2021.

## **Dedication**

For family I know, and family I don't know.

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## List of Figures

- Fig. 1. Sorell, Lindsay. *Vamp started for my brother*, 2020. Beads and thread on moose hide.
- Fig. 2. Sorell, Lindsay. *Vamps for my brother 2.0*, 2021. Beads and artificial sinew on moose hide.
- Fig. 3. Sorell, Lindsay. *kistapinânihk/Omaniciye Makoca & Area, c. 1900*, 2021. This is an approximate visualization combining *nehiyaw* and Dakota place-names with information from maps by Christensen (flyleaf, 77, 152, 301) and Code (108).
- Fig. 4. *James Isbister and children*. No date, Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert.
- Fig. 5. Innes, Ross. *The Sands of Time*. Turner-Warwick Publications Inc., 1986. pp. 43. Internet Archive. Accessed 2 June 2021.
- Fig. 6. “Mary Jane Flett-Isbister with husband Benjamin and child.,” c. 1880s. Glenbow Museum. *Mothers of the Resistance, 1869-1870: Red River Métis Genealogies*, <https://resistancemothers.wordpress.com/women-of-red-river/>. Accessed 1 July 2021.
- Fig. 7. Côté, Narcisse-Omer. “At Devil’s Lake.” 1900. 8236, ID No. 1, Shelf 1. Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert.
- Fig. 8. “Three Cree Women.” 1900. Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-B1627, ID 23778, Prince Albert.
- Fig. 9. Côté, Narcisse-Omer. “Indian woman & twins Green Lake.” 8236, ID No. 1, Shelf 1, 23. Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert.
- Fig. 10. Côté, Narcisse-Omer. “Duck Lake.” 1900. 8236, ID No. 1, Shelf 1, 23. Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert.
- Fig. 11. Côté, Narcisse-Omer. “Send off to the Half-Breed Commission, Grand Rapids.” 1900. 8236, ID No. 1, Shelf 1, 47. Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert.
- Fig 12. “James Isbister, pioneer of Prince Albert area, Saskatchewan.” Glenbow Museum, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/isbister\\_james\\_14E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/isbister_james_14E.html). Accessed 1 July 2021.
- Fig 13. Côté, Narcisse-Omer. “Send off to the Half-Breed Commission, Grand Rapids.” 1900. 8236, ID No. 1, Shelf 1, 47. Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert. Cropped photo.
- Fig 14. “On the Trail to Green Lake.” 1900. 8236, ID No. 1, Shelf 1, 36. Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert.
- Fig. 15. James, W. J. *Untitled*. Album #4, c. 1900-1905. 8245, 10, Shelf 1. Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

- Fig. 16. James, W. J. *Untitled*, cropped. Album #4, c. 1900-1905. 8245, 10, Shelf 1. Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.
- Fig. 17. McKay, Harriet Ann. "Tablecloth." 1900-1913. 1985.0042.01, 85.42A, Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert. Photo by Lindsay Sorell.
- Fig. 18. McKay, Harriet Ann. McKay, Harriet Ann. "Tablecloth." 1900-1913. 1985.0042.01, 85.42A, Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert. Detail. Photo by Lindsay Sorell.
- Fig. 19. Sorell, Lindsay. *Vamps for my brother: a saskatoon for each of us*, 2021.









Fig. 1. Sorell, Lindsay. *Vamp started for my brother*, 2020. Beads and thread on moose hide.

## **Doing and Undoing: an introduction to this paper**

*I am writing this in the kitchen my mom grew up in, with a fly buzzing in the lampshade above my head. Where I sit is about a forty-five minute drive to the northwest of kistapinânihk, the current site of the city of Prince Albert (P.A.), Saskatchewan. The vamp I am beading for my brother's maskisina sits in a circle of light on the table in front of me and I am contemplating whether or not I should undo the beadwork. The shape of the strawberries isn't quite right—they are looking more like cherries than anything.*

This thesis began when I was a small girl. My mom told me that I was a Métis (“MAY-dee” she calls us). She said I am a leader like my ancestors were leaders. Years later, I peered at a fringed hide jacket from 1913 covered in decadent beaded florals in a display cabinet at the Prince Albert Historical Society (PAHS). It looked so regal and I wondered: *Did my ancestors*



indigo wool broadcloth table mat “purchased from the Riel family” at Prince Albert in 1885 (Racette 269). At the mention of both Riel and that date, 1885, I realized I needed to approach this region, *kistapinânihk* and its surrounding Métis communities — the site of highly traumatic events which resulted in the large-scale splitting and scattering of many peoples — differently, politically.

This paper carves out its approach to *otipemisiwak* beadwork in relation to *kistapinânihk* from a grounding block of Indigenous methodologies. I begin by outlining the personal process I have gone through to approach this research, and the lessons and reflections on identity that form the basis of this work. Second, I move into discussion of the political significance of handcrafts and dress in the face of oppression. Third, I discuss the flow of people through *kistapinânihk*, cultural influences and relationships, and major events effecting patterns of dress and the creation of material culture. Lastly, I identify patterns of subversive dress and handcrafts in the PAHS *mîkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) collection and Narcisse-Omer Côté’s album of 153 photographs of the 1900 Northwest Half-Breed Commission.

As I rewrite this introduction for hopefully the last time, this week I am also re-beading the *maskisina* vamp for my brother from months earlier. I am reminded of a reflection by Chipewyan, Gwich’in, French, Scottish, and English scholar Lois Weber-Pillwax Edge who identifies a similarity between beading and writing (15). She tells a story: “While beading, my teacher instructs me to un-do and re-do a leaf several times as my initial attempts are not up to standards of norm for good quality craftsmanship. Just as I do, undo and redo my beadwork so too have I undone and redone this writing to attain a reasonable standard of quality fitting to a novice in such an undertaking” (10). My overly complex design of strawberries, saskatoons, and leaves became three simple saskatoons representing my immediate family members. A novice in both beadwork and in my understanding of the peoples of *kistapinânihk*, I hope with this work of care to contribute to my community by honouring the history here, telling some of our stories, and encouraging more of our stories to be told for the ultimate ends of healing and joy.

## **My heart, my dreams, my methodological thinking**

This project has been just as much about my heart and my real life as it has been about the research and scholarly contribution. Taking Margaret Kovach’s lead, I have chosen to maintain a first person perspective, and weave my own personal narrative throughout the research to “keep grounded” (*Indigenous Methodologies* 21). I embarked upon a research process that involved “researcher preparation” in the form of experiential reflection in the form of journaling, walking, singing, beading, sewing, even baking—and eating—bannock smeared with saskatoon jam when I needed some comfort. As I began to reflect on my responsibility to



conversations together, their smells, their eyes, their stories, our laughter, many cups of coffee, and many jokes. After all, as Dane Allard quotes in his paper *Weaving and Baking Nation*,

Lorraine Freeman: And what is a pure Métis?

Rose LaFreniere: “It’s the one that tells good jokes!”

\*Laughter\* (1)

I re-told that to my mom and, boy, that sure cracked her up. Being with my family, discussing this research with them, looking at their photos of growing up, has taught me a lot about how Indigenous peoples surpass every scholarly or legal definition of who we are and who we are not. It is life together that is beautiful, how we conduct ourselves in everyday life that demonstrates wisdom. Humour is a major aspect of our strength and survival, and is something that is not often seen in scholarship; it is a life-way, as I have come to learn by watching the elder men and women in my family, and it has been an important aspect of this research as well.

These teachings of humour and flexibility allowed me to adjust my process to the constraints of the pandemic. My first vision of this research was as a community-based story-gathering project based on interviews with local beadworkers, Knowledge Keepers, and Elders. My methodology involved meeting community members primarily through my grandma and her friendships, and gathering stories from them during in-person interviews, and getting to know each other over chats over tea, food, and protocol. I wanted to ensure my scholarship benefited the community by basing it on real relationships, oral histories, and storytelling. However, pandemic restrictions related to human research suddenly prevented me from exchanging conversation with Elders and Knowledge Keepers in person. Aware that the storytelling conversations I wanted to have with community members would require a high level of trust due to their deeply personal nature, the restriction of these conversations to web-hosted platforms during the pandemic made interviews suddenly unrealistic (Kovach 98-99). Additionally, I was prevented by regulation from visiting Museum collections in person. So, if I were to finish the paper at all, I had to be flexible and shift my approach while maintaining my main goal of contributing to the community.

As a result, I shifted my attention from interviews with Knowledge Keepers and Elders toward scholarship and recommendations already contributed by Elders and Knowledge Keepers in the area. I took the opportunity to do more of a deep-dive into the work already done, a means of gathering information for future interviews in the community and for other scholars to build on. Coupled with the inability to physically visit museum collections of beadwork at this time, this paper also made a shift toward what I could learn from existing scholarship and collections of *mikisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) available to me in photographs and digital databases. I also invited several museum professionals to offer their perspectives on the process

of collecting and identifying Métis artifacts through an e-mail questionnaire. My mother's photograph collection, existing online photographic databases, and material sent to me by museum professionals, offered unexpectedly rich and beautiful records of Métis and First Nations faces, dress, and survival in *kistapinânihk* during the incredibly difficult times of 1862 to 1900.

The sites of conflict that I saw in photographs, I also saw reflected in the land around me, in a kind of never-ending circle. Privileged with living in the site I was researching, I took the land on as a kind of tutor. I went to bed every night listening to the wolves and the coyotes howling and yipping, or frogs croaking, crickets rubbing their wings together, wind howling, lightning striking, clouds rolling in. Much of our family conversation revolved around the pattern and direction of the wind, the temperature, the type of clouds approaching, the time of sunrise and sunset, identifying animal droppings, and plant life. For my family, living almost an hour northeast of P.A. in the bush with electricity that often goes out and unreliable phone service and internet, this wasn't small-talk at all. Rather, this was age-old conversation related to survival, to responsibility, to participating reciprocally in our natural community with eyes wide open, and most of all, to a willing intergenerational respect for the natural world.

What the land taught me reverberated in harmony with the work of many Indigenous scholars. Kovach relates the teachings of Métis Elder Irene Calliou about living in reciprocal relationship to the natural world to an Indigenous research framework, saying it must involve "living life in a way that reflects goodness, that reflects *miyo*" (Kovach 63). *Miyo*, meaning "good" in *nehiyawewin*, she writes is about "sharing and generosity, respecting the earth and all its inhabitants, working hard, and caring for other people" (63). Aileen Moreton-Robinson also says that "relationality" is "the core presupposition of the Indigenous social research paradigm" and "finds expression within culturally specific and gendered axiologies, ontologies, and epistemologies that are connected to the earth" (71). She says that such a research paradigm "informs our epistemological and ethical premise that social research should begin with an awareness of our proper relationships with the world we inhabit, and is conducted with respect, responsibility, generosity, obligation, and reciprocity" (71). Understanding good relations springs from teachings given to us from the natural world. Maria Campbell shared something to this effect in her recent 2021 talk, "Ni'wahkomakanak: All My Relations." She said, "My grandmother told me a story once. We were out talking and we were in a meadow and she said, 'Look at all of them.' She was pointing at all the different medicines and all these different flowers and shrubs and trees. She said, 'These are all related to each other. None of them is trying to push the other out or say their medicine is better than the other. We are the only people who do that.'" Teachings from the whispers of earth's complex workings are reiterated in the writing and teachings of many Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and scholars such as

Maria Campbell's grandmother and Maria Campbell herself. These teachings are related to the Cree concept of *wahkohtowin*, which can be loosely translated to "kinship or being related to each other" (Wildcat 14). More deeply, it "encompasses the act of being related, a worldview that everything is related, and a set of laws or obligations around how to conduct good relationships" (Wildcat 14). This knowledge had great effect on my manner of thinking through beadwork, and my responsibilities as a *otipemisiwak* community member and researcher far beyond the scope of this project. This research applies these teachings of *miyo*, of generosity and sharing, of supporting all peoples rather than trying to push some out, to my methodology. It calls scholars of Indigenous studies to use this research to contribute back into Indigenous communities, to emphasize and build healthy connections between peoples.

Like my advisor and friend, Laura Beard, said to me during one of our many conversations, "We are alive because our ancestors wanted us to be." Knowing that we are here on purpose, and our stories do in fact exist somewhere, even if just in the memory of the earth empowers me and motivates me to move forward for the benefit of the  $\triangleright \cap \vee \Gamma \rho \triangleleft \setminus$ . This research hopes to tell the story of my own ancestors in *kistapinânihk* to pay tribute to all my relations and kinship connections in the area, and demonstrate how important relationship continuums are to the formation of history, identity, and material culture. There are countless stories of Métis and First Nations families, relations, and histories in the area, stories that need to be told in order to understand and identify the beadwork that records them. This paper merely represents a few threads of those complex and interwoven narratives, with the hope that it can contribute to strengthening our community further, and inspire future related research in the region.

## **Resistance Beads: Handcrafts and the "awakening" of the people**

### *The Mobilizing Power of Fashion*

My mother is a fantastic seamstress. I have three older brothers and, growing up, we mostly wore clothes she sewed for us or hand-me-downs that came in black garbage bags from our cousins. I spent many hours playing with her fabric, looking through her tin of buttons, and flipping through her box of patterns, gazing lovingly at the colourful drawings on the front. This is where I learned to love the feeling of fabric, to dream up designs, to view it as a sculpture. My mom taught me basic machine and hand-sewing skills growing up, but it wasn't until I was in my mid-twenties however that I asked my mom to teach me how to sew, like *really* sew. I thought it would be easy since I already had basic sewing skills and a background in sculpture,

but I was wrong. Nevertheless, sewing opened up a world of visual expression for me and I slowly began to make my own clothing designs.

This growing interest in clothing design drew me to the 2019 Western Canadian Fashion Week in *amiskwaciywâskahikan*, where I saw there would be a slate of Indigenous designers. Luxx Ready-to-Wear showed their F/W 2019/20 Indigenous Metamorphosis Collection, which incorporates syllabics, a geometric black and white kaleidoscopic pattern, fringe, and imagery of the butterfly. The description of the collection teaches about its connection to the *nehiyawewin* word and concept of *wahkohtowin*, which the designer Derek Jagodzinsky (Whitefish Lake First Nation) writes, “denotes the interconnected nature of relationships, communities, and natural systems throughout the globe” (“FW 2019/20”). Mobilize/*waskawewin*, meaning ‘movement’, a brand designed by Dusty LeGrande, began with a smudge, and also incorporated syllabics and fringe; Mobilize models posed with fists raised in the air. Dusty’s sister, performance artist Cheyenne Rain LeGrande, walked in the show and, in a gesture drawing acute attention to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls crisis, smeared her face with red paint at the top of the walkway. Dusty LeGrande said in a recent interview with *Complex*, “I wanted my fashion to become a space where I could be loud with designs, and let everyone know Indigenous people are still here, still strong, and still present without having to say a word. It would just exist on my clothing.” He discusses how he builds his streetwear designs around historical *nehiyawak* clothing, tattoo traditions, matriarchy, and teachings, and works to connect and build community with local Indigenous hip-hop musicians, artists, MCs, and poets (Mullin).

These designers very pointedly uplifted both traditional ways and new Indigenous strength. Seeing the work of these designers was my entrance into the economic and activist contemporary world of Indigenous fashion design which forms a powerful network of across the globe. Indigenous fashion brands based in or from the western provinces of Canada alone include such names as Evan Ducharme (Vancouver, BC), Heather Crowshoe Couture (Northern Piikani Nation, Niitsitapii Territory), JShine (*amiskwaciywâskahikan*), *Kihew* and *Rose* (*kisipatnahk*), Kimberley Bellerose-Williams (*amiskwaciywâskahikan*), Lor Brand (Winnipeg, MB), Lynette La Fontaine (Fraser Lake, BC), Meagan Anishinabie (Cold Lake, AB), *mîkiskahtak* creations (Bigstone Cree Nation), *Mokwa Iskwehis* (La Ronge, SK), *Nimis* Creations (Winnipeg, MB), *Nisotew* (Onoway/Lac St. Anne, AB), Northern Plains by Carol Mason (Kainai Nation, Niitsitapii Territory), Sage Paul (English River First Nation), Savage Rose by Melanie Parsons (*Mohkintsis*/Calgary, *Île-à-la-Crosse*, *Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation*), *shinli’ Niintaih* (*amiskwaciywâskahikan*), and countless more.

Witnessing the distinct power of these fashion designers to promote Indigenous thriving, I shifted further toward looking at *mîkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) through an amplified lens of



activism, resistance, decolonization, and healing. In this light, beadwork is not only a celebration of culture, but is a symbol of and call for freedom from oppression. I kept thinking of Martinique-born revolutionary political philosopher Frantz Fanon, who has greatly influenced and inspired Indigenous scholars such as Métis scholar Howard Adams and Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (Coulthard, “Glen Coulthard: Fanonian Antinomies”). Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth*, “The poverty of the people, national oppression, and the inhibition of culture are one and the same thing” (238). He says that colonized peoples work to shake off colonialism by setting “high value on the customs, traditions, and the appearance of his people”—he refers to examples of traditional culture such as the sari, pampooties, and Indigenous languages—as a “symbol for the uselessness and shallowness” of the colonial structure (221). Embracing these traditions point to the inability of colonial powers to assimilate oppressed peoples.

While Fanon did powerfully establish the thought that artmaking is an essential aspect of the awakening and empowering of a colonized people to free themselves from oppression, he was very wary of the romanticization of a people’s traditional culture in the process, and at times problematically relegated traditional cultural ways to simply a step in the road to a more dynamic, vibrant national culture (Lee 170). Fanon writes that in emphasizing traditions and customs, the “native intellectual who comes back to his people by way of cultural achievements . . . wishes to attach himself to the people; but instead he only catches hold of their outer garments.” He concludes that “these outer garments are merely the reflection of a hidden life, teeming and perpetually in motion” (*Wretched of the Earth* 223-224). According to Fanon, it is only as a colonized people awaken and begin to transition from exclusively addressing the oppressor in their creative work to addressing their own people, new innovations in literature, in oral traditions, in handicrafts, become a form of “combat,” and an important the “awakening of national consciousness” (239-242). In this process of awakening, what was “teeming” inside our beings would begin to manifest in physical and visual forms.

Where Fanon saw the handcraft as the manifestation of the inner life of its maker, Indigenous beadworkers and scholars such as Edge view the *míkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) itself as alive. Edge quotes a personal communication from June 2008 by a Métis artist from her 2008 Beading Circle:

When I am doing beadwork I want people to see it and see that it is alive. It is alive because I am alive. What I bead on is hide and it’s alive. To me there is movement in life. With my beadwork, I want it to tell a story. I want people to see that the flower once was a tiny seed, that the earth that nourished it, it struggled to break through the soil, the warmth of the sun and the rain that brought it to life, in a sense, how it was a bud and now it is open, and it’s honouring the Creator and everything around us. (102)

No only is the beadwork alive, but each bead's colour carries a thought, a prayer, and a piece of the non-human world. Edge quotes another intricately poetic personal communication from July 2008:

The bead's colour makes no sound, but it is, cranberry, moss and fireweed. It is also wolf willow, sap and sawdust, as well as chickadee, magpie and jackrabbit. A bead is not simply dark blue, but Saskatoon blue. It is not merely black, but beaver head black ... She, this link, holds each bead berry, a thought, each bead berry a word in prayer, for her son, for her daughter, for her grandchild. (82)

Edge shows us how *mikisihkahcikewin* (beadwork), according to its traditional ways and teachings, is a living manifestation of land, spirituality, and family relations. Just because it is a traditional art form does not mean it is stagnant cultural romanticism as Fanon might have underestimated. Learning to bead in traditional ways strengthens community structures and remains an active combatant against colonial oppression. Today, responding and adapting to COVID-19 conditions, artists such as Tania Larsson (Gwich'in), Jamie Okuma (Shoshone-Bannock and Luiseño), Justine Woods (Métis), and Jean Marshall (Anishinaabe) have been leading community-building beading circles online (Allaire "How Virtual Beading Circles Are Empowering Indigenous Women"; "Beads & Bannock: Beading Circle."; "Jean Marshall"; "Beading Circle with Justine Woods"). In Fanon's eyes, this would indicate a mobilizing of Indigenous peoples throwing off the trappings of the oppressor, adapting to contemporary conditions, and working for the internal eyes and purposes of their own peoples.

### *Beadwork is Scholarship Itself*

Considering the power of dress, I started to search for scholarship that relates *otipemisiwak* beadwork/dress to resistance and decolonization. I was in for a wild ride however, because I began to see that fashion studies is still primarily Eurocentric and similarly scattered across disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, business analysis, psychology, history, cultural studies, and many other subdisciplines (Lillethson and Welters 32). However, while there is still an absence of studies specifically related to fashion and *otipemisiwak*, there has been an increase in studies relating fashion and resistance practices with a focus on non-European contexts since Beverly Lemire's *The Force of Fashion in Politics and Society* in 2010, such as an entire issue of *Fashion Theory* dedicated to the "unprecedented politicization of fashion" in 2019 (Gaugele and Titton). An additional barrier to compiling research about *otipemisiwak* handcrafts and resistance is that scholarship about *otipemisiwak* beadwork alone is scattered across a variety of discrete fields of study. It is a subject orbiting on the periphery of a variety of

disciplines, and so often finds itself absorbed into and based on the discrete scholarly corpuses, and buried in obscure discipline-specific journals such as the *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly*, *The Beaver*, in hard-to-find exhibition catalogues such as “Ayapaahipiikh/ Naahkouhk: Lii Portray Dii Michif, 1880-2011” from the Batoche National Historic Site in 2011, or in dissertations and MA theses that are difficult to access. Thankfully, the University of Alberta librarians and inter-library loan program made many materials available to me through the mail, and the pandemic necessitated many online workshops and talks with beadworkers that may not have happened otherwise. Hopefully this thesis can act as a gathering place for many of these resources.

I found that *míkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) is a text that exists beyond the boundaries of disciplines. It is personal, it is medicine, it is knowledge, it is living, it is love, it is healing, it is family, it is continued connection with your culture, it is scholarship, it is many things. My thesis advisor and friend, Laura Beard, forwarded me the news that Métis scholar from Treaty 1 territory in the Red River Valley, Danielle Lussier recently made it into the news for completing a 500-page PhD dissertation that included a beaded honour shawl as part of her final project studying Law at University of Ottawa (@OttawaMorning; Cotnam). Lussier’s beadwork depicts a matriarch bison standing behind her children. Lussier says of the matriarch bison, “She has on her back the law of the prairie, which was a Métis legal system that governed buffalo hunt and community structures” (Cotnam). Likewise, in 2019, Tara Kappo (Woodland Cree from Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation), completed *kiskinohawmatok*, a beaded work created for the office of the president and provost at University of Alberta as part of her master’s thesis (Brodie). This work is a wreath of sweetgrass, strawberry blossoms, wild roses, and blueberries encircling the UofA logo, beaded on velvet. The artist says the work is “a reflection of what she envisions as the type of place the University of Albert can be – a space where different knowledges and gifts are respected and shares, a space of *miyo wîcêhtowin* (good relationships) that, in turn, help create *miyo pimâtisiwin* (a good life) for us all” (Brodie). Kappo’s beadwork depicts plantlife related to healing and ceremony to demonstrate our interconnectedness as peoples, to teach through imagery about our mutual flourishing and allyship (Brodie). Christi Belcourt quotes an interview with Racette at length who says, “I was taught ... that when you’re beading you’re to try to have clean thoughts, especially if you’re making something for another person. So that you’re kind of stitching love and goodwill into that piece so that something of that feeling is incorporated or stitched into the beadwork” (*Beadwork* 17). The act of beading establishes patterns of good thought, and allows that good thought to be transferred to your community members. I think back to my *nehiyawewin* classes, taught by the incredible Chelsea Vowel and Dorothy Thunder at University of Alberta. In Intermediate *nehiyawewin*, we began to incorporate beading every Wednesday into our language-learning. Dorothy encouraged us to *nehiyawe*, or speak

*nehiyawewin*, while we beaded together and help each other learn how to bead. She helped us to learn that the language, ceremony, creativity, and our interactions with each other are inseparable.

Kappo demonstrated how knowledge of the land is intimately connected to knowledge about *mîkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork). Métis Elder and healer Rose Richardson writes in *Medicine to Help Us*, “Being Métis meant being in tune spiritually with our surroundings. Our culture, our lifestyle, our spirituality was and still is influenced by our environment.” She goes on, “Years ago many of our ancestors were not able to write. As a result, stories and knowledge were beaded or embroidered into clothing and on items of everyday use. As they drew the design they told the story of the plant, and many times these were specific plants for specific people as their guiding plant” (Belcourt *Medicines to Help Us* 8). Beadwork carries teachings about our history in relation to the land; land, the stories, and the beadwork all flow into one another. I saw this confirmed in the conversations I had with my own family because their stories always brought me back to beadwork. The beadwork always brought me back to the land. The land always brought me back to the stories. Every precious story my grandparents tell me, every Sunday discourse about the birds we have seen or the direction of the wind, has strengthened my understanding of the connection between the natural world and our family stories, the preciousness of which is illustrated in the time-consuming practice of *mîkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork). Carrying an intimate friendship with nature is about health and survival, but also about family memories, trips taken together, group activities, mutual love, and mutual responsibilities. Learning to be a good steward of the land through beadwork and cultural connections also builds self-confidence, inner and outer strength. Belcourt writes, “All plants are medicine. My own experience in getting to know the plants has helped me to feel whole and healthy. It has helped me in my relationships with others, and to be more respectful of the gift of life that we share” (*Medicines to Help Us* xiii). It always feed backs into community, including the land around you. As I researched *otipemisiwak* beadwork and listened to my grandparents’ stories of how there once were berries absolutely everywhere, I felt the responsibility to re-plant Saskatoons on the land we live on—my grandparents’ land. With their permission, I planted thirty Saskatoon bushes and three blueberry bushes, and am caring for them so that they can get re-established and provide sustenance for us and the animals of the area. I go and visit them every day. That is the place I think, the place I pray, and usually the place I go to cry. That is one of my research locations, you could say. Those stories and knowledges are what beadwork carries.

*mîkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) is about participating in community, but it is also about finding and celebrating your unique voice. Beadworkers Jessica Sanderson-Barry (JShine) and Adrienne Larocque (Kihew & Rose), as well as entrepreneur Shani Gwin, participated in an

Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs Panel in June 2021, where they discussed the role of beadwork in their lives. Sanderson-Barry said, “Beading is medicine to me; it keeps me grounded.” She also noted that she has learned through the years that it is about authenticity, finding your personal voice in your beadwork (Gwin et al.). After hearing her say this, I understand why Sanderson-Barry’s jewellery has such a unique voice. Her work has a special gentleness about it; she uses soft hand-tanned moose, leaving much of it free of adornment, minimally decorated with pastel pink, coral, and teal beads and dyed tufted moose or caribou hair. A beadworker’s aesthetic isn’t simply a regional byproduct. I think of the incredible Métis beadworker Philomene Umpherville of Brochet, Manitoba, who worked from many patterns, many of which took inspiration from things she liked such as Smarties, Jelly Beans, and Licorice, which she associated with precious memories (Tracy 177). She also often drew her patterns from dreams she had and directly from her environment, including plantlife, as well as rope, an umbrella, a wagon wheel, ribbons, a wind mill, a cup, etc (Tracy 176-7). Mrs. Umpherville said some motifs don’t mean anything, and some of them she “just thought of” (171, 178). Likewise, Belcourt writes that beadwork “is an expression of a beader’s identity. It is an art form that connects us to the skills, sacrifices and creativity of our ancestors. *mîkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) carries images that are ancient and reflect spiritual beliefs.” She adds, “And even more than that, beadwork is a healing art” (*Beadwork* 6).

### *Métis Peoplehood, Nationhood, and Material Culture*

These beautiful teachings about the significance of *mîkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) have been included in more recent scholarship related to Indigenous beadwork. However, scholarship about Métis material culture still struggles with the idea that our best work was done in Red River before the Resistance of 1869-1870. Gloria Jane Bell writes that the majority of twentieth century scholarship on *otipemisiwak* scholarship used a “golden age paradigm” established in the belief that the Métis heyday of creative and political influence was between 1820-1870s and since has declined and disappeared (“Oscillating Identities” 10). Bell points to Brassier, the first scholar to promote the labelling of the *otipemisiwak* as “the flower beadwork people” in articles he wrote between 1985 and 1987 (as they were called by the *Oceti Sakowin*) (“Oscillating Identities” 10). Brassier was also the first to insist on this “mythical golden era” of the Métis and their subsequent decline (Bell 10-11). This idea was also carried over in the work of Sharon Blady, however her studies, such as *The Flower Beadwork People: Factors Contributing to the Emergence of a Distinctive Métis Culture & Artistic Style at Red River from 1844-1869* done in 1995, has greatly contributed to the field.

Bell sees *otipemisiwak* studies as a 25-year continuum of scholarship from the “golden age paradigm” era of the 1980s to the date of her writing “Oscillating Identities” (2013), with a distinct divide between scholarship in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Although she does not describe in detail how or why this transition out of the golden age paradigm took place, she does assert Racette’s 2004 dissertation *Sewing Ourselves Together*—built upon feminist and women’s studies—as an enormous breakthrough in the field (Bell 14). It is important to add to this assertion that Indigenous activism related to the 1988 Glenbow exhibition *The Spirit Sings* in Calgary, Alberta, and subsequent formation of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, was a key factor in this shifted attitude toward Indigenous materials (Conaty 4; Lonetree 17-18). Racette’s introduction of a more holistic view of Métis materials, including dress studies theory and viewing material culture as part of identity construction, a reflection of community, economy, relationships, etc.—“social realities”—was one of the results of this shift in attitude (Bell 12). Racette was one of many in the 2000s and 2010s, such as Barkwell et al.’s anthology and bibliography *Metis Legacy* (2001), Tracy (2003), Edge (2011), Muehlebach (2017), Powell (2018), Allard (2019), to connect Métis material culture studies with personal reflections, and the knowledge and stories of Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers. More recently, Gaugele and Tittton’s issue of *Fashion Theory*, and books on beadworking stories such as Piatote’s *The Beadworkers Stories* (2020) and *Vogue* writer Christian Allaire’s *The Power of Style* (2021) have contributed to the conversation.

Meanwhile, a great debate about how to define the Métis as a people group has continued to wage in Métis studies since the field’s inception. This scholarly battle, as Robert Innes, Chris Andersen, and Aileen Moreton-Robinson have pointed out, has often been based on a legacy of racist logic (Andersen 27; Innes 109; Moreton-Robinson 74). Innes writes that this racist logic, which forms the core of Western methodologies of hierarchical classification, insists the Métis are “not as primitive as Indians but not quite as civilized as white people. Neither white nor Indian but a new race of people, the Métis could not be seen as similar to First Nations” (Innes 109). This “racist fiction” asserts that the Métis are defined by their “level of whiteness”—to exist as a category of human in a racist hierarchy (Innes 105). As Andersen writes, “the nascent state of the field of Métis studies” still “remains mired in debates about racial or national definitions of the term” Métis (27). Under such hierarchical racist logic, scholarship has often emphasized the cultural and racial differences between Métis and First Nations peoples, rather than their cultural similarities and kinship connections (Andersen 92).

Innes points out how Métis studies, while it has emphasized the distinctness of the Métis people, as well as tensions between the Métis and First Nations bands, has neglected to explore Métis cultural similarities with First Nation groups (97). For example, Métis followed First Nations practices related to adoption, god-parenting, adopting outsiders, attended many of the

same dances, sports, and churches, and people from both groups acted as mediators, wore sashes, jigged, farmers, and so on (100, 104). Macdougall shows how Métis from Red River to Fort Carlton to Edmonton travelled in hunting groups referred to as “brigades,” which were “organizational units similar to Indian bands,” between at least the 1840s to 1870s (24, 30). They were led by an adult man or woman “with a strong personality, knowledge of the region, and with excellent hunting ability” (24). As with the Trottier Brigade, groups were often formed through the kinship of sisters and related women at their core (26). Macdougall and St-Onge also trace the life and Métis kinship of Johnny Grant, born in Edmonton 1833, who had relatives all over the Plains, including territory across the 49th Parallel (258). Grant travelled with as many as 105 family members to locations along his extended family network, and felt free to call upon distant cousins such as the Honourable James McKay of Prince Albert. Macdougall and St-Onge write, “The Métis must be regarded as a set of relational constellations—kinescopes—where families such as the Wilkies or Grants connected to others, building extensive economic networks based on inter-generational extended family networks across the northern Plains” (261).

Some scholars see the emphasis on the discreteness of the Métis people as the business of politics of recognition. Allard recently argued in his 2019 dissertation *Weaving and Baking Nation* that material symbols such as bannock and the sash have become “ethno-nationalist symbols” adopted by Métis organizations as part of a politics of recognition in the wake of Bill C-31 (Allard 44). Allard examines a set of interviews put forth by two Métis women and Co-Chairs of the Cultural Heritage Committee of the Métis Women of Manitoba Inc, in which interviewees were presenting with “leading questions” pressuring them to identify with bannock and the sash as essentialist symbols of a shared identity (iii, 4). Allard writes, “The proliferation of the Sash in the 1990s indicated the increasing clout of Red River culture in defining Métis ethno-nationalism. In this context, the sash stood in as a re-invented tradition used to legitimate Métis organizations and their political efforts, representing a “turning back” to a historical past to repurpose an object for contemporary identity creation” (Allard 34). Allard asserts that the sash has become repurposed a symbol of Métis provincial organizations, rather than an integral part of the life ways and stories of real Métis people today.

Many other scholars across the field of Métis studies have voiced their concerns over the lack of scholarship connecting historic Métis culture in a continuous line to our present. Darren O’Toole wrote of the “current tendency in Métis studies ... to stress ethnogenesis and identity formation,” increasingly emphasizing “identities that are either geographically or economically limited” (144). In 2001, Pannekoek challenged the field of Métis studies to pursue contexts beyond historic Red River toward “determining the roots of the new Metis consciousness of

today” (116). Catherine Richardson also, in *Belonging Métis* (2016), wrote of her intention to move beyond “continually re-inventing that squeaky wheel on the Red River cart” so that the journey of upcoming scholars can “be about further deepening an understanding rather than going over the more well-trodden landscape of identity and ideas about being Métis” (3). Furthermore Richardson, who writes from the perspective of a Métis social worker and community counsellor, notes that limited definitions Métis membership related to proving Red River ancestry with genealogical and scrip documents is an act of Métis political bodies “seeking to limit membership for the purpose of future land claim” (3, 13). She found that individuals who have been displaced in the child care system, or who have had their Métis heritage purposefully hidden from them by family—often until the dying breath of a relative—frequently believe “the definition wars to be largely political as opposed to meaningful for their lives” (17, 32, 41). For individuals who did not grow up with their generational stories, it is no surprise that scholarship reflects the lack of continuity of many Métis stories, lifeways, and cultural elements such as beadwork from the height of the fur trade in the 1820s-70s to Métis today in 2021. Displacement and trauma has played a large role in the formation of knowledge gaps in the field and in families. Pannekoek points to a particular knowledge gap between the years of 1900 and 1950 (116).

Despite displacement, trauma, and scholarly knowledge gaps, Métis have been experiencing an “awakening,” and Métis scholar Howard Adams from St. Louis, Saskatchewan, described it in *Prison of Grass* (170). Adams, heavily influenced by Fanon in his thinking, ties this awakening to cultural production. He describes this return to traditional ways and culture as a “cultural nationalism” that is in fact “reactionary nationalism” (170). He writes, “Today, in our awakening, many Indians of Canada are returning to native religion and tribal rituals. The danger in this is that it might begin to sever any links with a progressive liberation ideology” (170). He warns of the paternalistic “reinforcement of colonization through the encouragement of non-political native cultural activities” by government-funded projects and colonial institutions (170). He argues that “in fact, any native cultural conference or festival that excludes politics furthers cultural imperialism” (170). The study and production of Métis culture therefore, in Adams’s view, is a reinforcement of imperialism if it excludes political engagement and the fight for freedom from colonial oppression.

Institutions, who often possess the pen and lens through which the public views Indigenous material culture—if not possessing the material culture itself—hold responsibility to consider the political and imperial aims of both the creation, study, and revival of historic material culture. Lillethun and Welters describe how museums and publications in Europe promoted their historic material culture prior to 1900 because it served their nationalistic purposes:



Publications of national costume had begun prior to 1900 as a vehicle for romantic nationalism. This movement was particularly strong in Europe, where researchers travelled to villages to gather folktales and songs, study local customs surrounding births and weddings, and collect local “peasant” or “folk” dress for newly founded ethnographic museums. Presses eagerly published folk costume and regional dress titles, especially when such publications suited nationalism. An unintended result was that dress publications further split into “traditional dress” (unchanging) and “historic costume” (fashion). (51)

The promotion of “folk costume” and “regional dress” suited the nationalistic agenda of European ethnographic museums and publications. This romantic promotion of traditional culture resulted in “further split” between the romantic past (seen as unchanging) and current life or fashion (seen as changing). This is just what Adams argues in *Prison of Grass*: that essentialist studies of material culture can work to further separate cultures, timelines, and peoples—“a return to extreme separatism”—rather than explore rights and peoples based on *wahkohtowin*, or our interconnectedness (Adams 170). Traditionalism void of connection with other peoples and the current fight for freedom from oppression resorts to an “extreme separatism” that is not consistent with Cree-Métis teachings about our responsibilities to one another. Judith Butler also recently described how nationalism void of relational ethics can lead to a violent war logic:

The exceptions to the norm of nonviolence actually begin to elaborate forms of group identification, even nationalism, that result in a certain war logic. It goes like this: I am willing to defend those who are *like* me, or who might be understood as part of the generalized regime of myself, but not to defend those who are unlike me, which converts rather easily into the claim: I will defend only those who are like me, or recognizable to me, but will defend *against* those who are not recognizable to me and with whom no ties of belonging seem to exist. (*The Force of Nonviolence* 75)

Butler identifies how group identification can be based on who “is like me” can be used to justify violence done against those “unlike me.” As material culture can be an expression or icon of group identification, emphasizing the relationality of Métis and our *mîkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) also becomes an act of nonviolence. But, how do we celebrate our unique and distinct material culture without building, as Butler says, “elaborate forms of group identification” (75)?

Andersen offers us a theoretical framework for more rigorously and honestly discussing these issues of identity-making and relating in Métis studies scholarship. Andersen notes that, while the terms “nation” and “people” are often conflated when discussing the Métis, there is significant value in utilizing both terms and concepts as a dual relational framework. Rather than completely throwing out the term “nation” for its associations with exploitative colonial

projects, he suggests that we strip nationalism of its “Western teleology and apparently natural links to modern state building” (25). Rather, Andersen defines a nation as “a normative order . . . that holds the ability—like communities, kinship groups, or even families—to produce internal norms” (29-30). A people, he says, “possesses the singular ability to compel a competing people or peoples to coproduce intersociety norms that reflect neither collective’s internal norms but instead reflect their relationality” (30). Thus, peoplehood is “fruitfully understood as the external manifestation of (our) nationhood, not its replacement” (30). Considering both nationhood and peoplehood acknowledges the political recognition the Métis have received on a nation-to-nation level, while working to decolonize conceptions of nationhood related to colonial state projects. By intentionally examining the relationships between how the Métis both produce internal norms (as a nation) and external manifestations (as a people), this framework suggests that only one definition of “Métis” meets the requirements of both nationhood and peoplehood: the Métis from the Plains who have engaged in both projects. Individuals who self-identify as “Métis” due to their mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry—despite not having any connection to the Métis nation and people of the West—are not part of this system of relations and so require a different framework (Andersen 32). Like Maria Campbell says of the mixed-blood people in eastern Canada, “I have great empathy for them. I don’t understand why they have to be Western Métis. Why can’t they recognize the beautiful culture they have in their own territories? I am not going to give up my space for them just like I am not going to allow Indian Affairs to make me a treaty Indian. No. Those are my choices and nobody can take them from me” (“Ni’wahkomakanak: All My Relations”). The Métis of the Plains are a particular group, as Andersen says, due to our dual relationship with not only peoplehood but nationhood. So while emphasizing relationality, Andersen’s dual research framework of both nationhood and peoplehood respects both the unique boundaries of what constitutes a Métis, and seeks to truthfully and more expansively investigate Métis interactions and relations with their non-Métis relations and community members.

Andersen’s framework also makes room for relational discussion of the social nature of the formation of internal (relating to the nation) and external culture (relating to the people). Considering Andersen’s definitions of peoplehood and nationhood reveals possible tensions between internal and external expressions of Métis-ness when applied to previous discussions of “nationalism” in post-colonial, Métis, and fashion studies. Fanon considered culture made for the oppressor (the external representation of a “people”) to be unable to set an oppressed group free, but culture made by a people for its own people (the production of internal norms of a “nation”) to be valuable in awakening the people to free themselves from colonial oppression. Métis scholar Adams also found external representation of a “people” to be similarly powerless. He believed that if Indigenous culture is celebrated by external powers only insofar as it is

removed from political activism, it is only a pacifying paternal celebration incapable of producing freedom, only a “reactionary nationalism” (or, the external expression of a nation-less “people”) (170). Butler saw the space between internal and external norms to be the space where violence occurs—the space between those who are “like” me and “unlike” me, between the societal (nation) and intersocietal (people), those we are willing to defend and those we are willing to not (75). In the hands of Lillethun and Welters, “nationalism” (the strengthening of inward-facing cultural production) becomes a warning. Lillethun and Welters discussed the strengthening of “nationalism” (production of internal norms) through historical peasant material culture study in Europe just before the 20th Century. In this case, European study of their own internal material culture history established a traditional form of dress seen as “unchanging” from fashion which is ever-changing. Its study iconized certain elements as if forever frozen in time. Using Andersen’s dual framework however, questions arise as to how this establishment of unmoving internal norms (nationalism) might have influenced external intersocietal norms (relating to peoplehood). Lillethun and Welters expose how easy it might be to establish unmoving icons of national Métis internal norms without consideration the ability of dress to shift through time, and—most importantly—its translation and role in intersocietal relations.

Maria Campbell put forth a call in “Ni’wahkomakanak: All My Relations” to Indigenous scholars and community members to prioritize kinship bonds between Métis and First Nations peoples. These bonds trump racial and colonial categorizations aimed at making Indigenous peoples to disappear. I will quote her words at length:

I grew up in a world filled by relations. Not Indians, not half breeds, but all of my relations. We never said, my relative over there, Cindy Gaudet, the French Métis. We didn’t say, this is my little granddaughter over here, she is whatever category, Bill C31. These are used to define us and they make our world small. They also make us controllable and that is something we don’t think about. Every time we go into that Supreme Court and we ask the courts to determine who we are or how our lives should be, they make us smaller and gives them all the opportunity in the world to control us. Younger people for instance don’t know that this mattered more than the categories. They have been raised in a world where their identity is tied to Canada’s colonial . . . definitions. This is what I mean when I said at the beginning we have to work on ourselves. We need to dismantle the boundaries between us and reconnect as family again. This is so frustrating and painful. No other people have to deal with this. Why are we doing this to ourselves? . . . As your Auntie, I want to tell you to think about this and your own family. Each time you walk into a classroom, each time you do research, you write or do art, each time you sit down to visit with each other. Why do we do this to each other? We need to think about those things as scholars, as artists, we need to think about them, especially as Elders and Knowledge Keepers because our role in our community was to protect and look after and educate our young people. Why are we not spending more energy and time doing that instead of trying to become experts of something that is only going to make us smaller and disappear? How do we remain who we are when it is us who do this to each other? All of us Métis and First Nation. How do we honour who

we are and remain family? How do we practice in the midst of all of this now and in the future? Because if we don't, we are going to disappear very shortly and that is exactly what was expected of us when these people came into our territories. Thank you. (Campbell "Ni'wahkomakanak: All My Relations")

Campbell calls Indigenous scholars to our responsibilities to one another as family—to protect and respect one another in all aspects of life. This responsibility is the core of Indigenous research and existence, the reason Moreton-Robinson calls Indigenous research “social”: because “the social is relational, involving the interconnectedness of what people are doing and experiencing as the outcome of actions in the actualities of their lives and lands” (71). Such a focus on the relational is an act of dismantling supposedly “objective” Western systems of hierarchical classifications of both the human and non-human (Moreton-Robinson 75). It is the prioritization of our relatedness and responsibilities to one another above establishes racist hierarchies—in how we as Métis discuss ourselves and our dual internal and inter-societal expressions of Métis peoplehood and nationhood.



Fig. 2. Sorell, Lindsay. *Vamps for my brother 2.0*, 2021. Beads and artificial sinew on moose hide.

# **Indigenous Cultural Power, Repression, and Continuity in *kistapinânihk***

## *kistapinânihk/Omaniciye Makoca: Context*

*I am still working on those same vamps I started for my brother last year (Fig. 2). But now when I look at those tiny purple and red beads forming three saskatoons on each vamp, and smell the smoked moose hide, I see more than I once saw. I see opportunities to build on the kinship and love between our ancestors. I see the peoples in my family, the generations who have lived in kistapinânihk, who yearn even today to be together, and to see our peoples thrive. I see those saskatoons I planted on the land we care for here and I am re-committed to their growth, and to our growth.*

The powerful First Nation and ᐃᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂ history of *kistapinânihk* has predominantly been “white washed” by the European order since at least 1883 when *The Prince Albert Times*, which was financially controlled by Prime Minister John A. Macdonald by 1884, declared Reverend Nisbet to be the founder of Prince Albert (Adams 73-4; Smyth 661). Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members today however are pouring themselves into reestablishing the knowledge of the Indigenous history of *kistapinânihk*. Projects like the Indigenous Histories project at the Prince Albert Historical Society, which I am privileged to work with as a resident researcher, have been completely driven by a committee of Knowledge Keepers and Elders from six of the traditional Indigenous groups of this territory. Through this committee, signs along the riverbank and Little Red River Park honouring its traditional peoples and oral histories, have been established. Published histories and stories from Indigenous peoples of the area such as Deanna Christensen’s *Ahtahkakoop*, John McDonald’s *Kitotam: He Speaks to it*, Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*, Edward Ahenakew’s *Voice of the Plains Cree*, Leo Omani’s *Perspectives of Saskatchewan Dakota/Lakota Elders on the Treaty Process within Canada* and *Wahpeton Dakota Nation: An Ethno-Historical Connection to the Prince Albert Region from Pre-contact to the Present*, Howard Adam’s aforementioned *Prison of Grass*, and many others, have contributed to the growing body of written Indigenous accounts of *kistapinânihk* and area.

Understanding the Indigenous history of *kistapinânihk* is important to grasping, for one, how I as a person came to be living and breathing the air on this earth. Indigenous perspectives of history not only give those living in this land a more accurate, large, and layered perspective of time, they are crucial to identifying and calling out injustices aimed at Indigenous peoples.





Regarding Indigenous perspectives of history with honour and respect makes way for healing and strategizing how we can live in community with one another in a diversity that surpasses federal expectations. In regards material culture, mapping the historic flow of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples through the area also assists in mapping out the exchange of material culture and Indigenous and non-Indigenous aesthetic influences in *kistapinânihk* over the years. Understanding the various aesthetic and cultural influences in the area is an obvious aid in identifying the specific Indigenous authorship of and stories behind beadwork and other handcrafts. Let's begin to unravel the story of *kistapinânihk* with the place itself.

*nehiyaw* Elder Willie Ermine from *pakitahow sâkahikan* (Sturgeon Lake) defines *kistapinânihk* as meaning “a place where people stayed for long periods of time” (Ermine 1, 3). The Wolvengrey Cree-English dictionary also defines it as “the great meeting place” (Wolvengrey 495). This *nehiyaw* name–*kistapinânihk*–reverberates with its Dakota *Oyate* place-name: “*Omaniciye Makoca*” meaning “the Gathering Place” (Omani *Wahpeton Dakota Nation* 88). Omani describes how this name describes its location between the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers “where in centuries past the Dakota, the Cree, and other Aboriginal groups, came together to share their stories, ceremonies, trade medicines, as well as to make peace and intermarry with each other” (*Wahpeton Dakota Nation* 88). The North Saskatchewan River is called *kisiskâciwani-sîpiy* (“swift-flowing river” in *nehiyawewin*), and *Wakpa Min Te* (“big river” in Dakota) (Wolvengrey vol. 1 64; *Oyate Wahpeton Dakota Nation* 37). Conversely, the South Saskatchewan River is *wâwâskesiw-sîpiy* (“the Elk River” or “Red Deer River” in *nehiyawewin*) and *Minidueza* (“fast flowing water” in Dakota) (Christensen 5; Wolvengrey Vol. 2 541; Omani *Wahpeton Dakota Nation* 37).

Today, the *paskwâwiyiniwak* (Plains Cree), *sakâwiyiniwak* (Woodland Cree), *maskêkowiiniwak* (Swampy Cree), Dakota *Oyate* (including Dakota, Nakota (including Saulteaux/Assiniboine), and Lakota), *Denesuliné*, and *otipemisiwak* peoples are recognized as six Indigenous cultural groups with important ties to the land base of *kistapinânihk* (Wolvengrey Vol. 2 488, 556, 612; Taylor n.p.; Omani *Perspectives of Saskatchewan Dakota/Lakota Elders on the Treaty Process within Canada* 9). However, many Indigenous nations have long-standing relationships and contact with the region around *kistapinânihk*. *Niitsitapi* (Blackfoot) oral history also tells us that *Niitsitapi* traditional territory has extended as far north and east as the North Saskatchewan river, *kistapinânihk* and *oskana kâ-asastêki* (Regina) before being pushed south by the *Denesuliné*, although their oral history is often contradicted by academic researchers (Conaty 77). *Ammskaapipîkani* (Piegan, Blackfeet) leader Tearing Lodge, recorded by Edward Curtis, said that the *Niitsitapi* migrated from even further north, from north of the North Saskatchewan River around Lesser Slave Lake area (Conaty 76-7). This area, he says, they call *Istssòhtsi* (“in the brush”) (Conaty 77). As they migrated south toward the

North Saskatchewan River, they would have had easy access during that time to all locations up and down the river, including *kistapinânihk*. *Niitsitapi* have a long history with the *nehiyawak* and the region around *kistapinânihk*, and many stories to tell. John Peter Pruden, who was Chief Trader at Fort Carlton along the North Saskatchewan River until 1837, recorded groups of “Blackfoot, Blood, Sarcee, Peigan, and Gros Ventre” in the district (Christensen 52).

The Dakota *Oyate* have a deep-running and crucial historical and continuing role in *Omaniciye Makoca*. The *Wahpetonwan*, meaning “Dwellers Among the Leaves,” is one of the seven original bloodlines of the Dakota *Oyate*; even the name of their bloodline carries a “reference to the boreal forest where the *Wahpeton* Dakota live” (Omani *Perspectives of Saskatchewan Dakota/Lakota Elders* 9; Omani *Wahpeton Dakota Nation* 9, 27). Although the Dakota *Oyate* are a people who have been tirelessly misrepresented as being simply refugees from the Dakota *Oyate*-U.S. government conflict, *Wahpetonwan* have inhabited this region since time immemorial (Omani *Wahpeton Dakota Nation* 42). Many important sites in the *Omaniciye Makoca/kistapinânihk* area, and all over Saskatchewan, are Dakota and come from Dakota stories, history, and language, or were at one time a Dakota campsite. For example, the area in which my *câpan* (great-grandpa) Stanley Whitford and his father grew up, Lily Plain, to the west of what is considered Prince Albert today, was a traditional seasonal Dakota campsite, but became a key settlement area for Métis such as my family members after 1862 as well (Omani 88). Today, this is where “Whitford Road” is, which is my grandmother’s maiden name. My grandma took my cousin and me pretty much door-to-door visiting relatives along that road last summer. Red Deer Hill was also a traditional Dakota campsite, and became a major *otipemisiwak* settlement area. Other traditional campsites include the current site of the Saskatchewan Penitentiary, Miller’s Hill, Carlton High School, Cooke Municipal Golf Course, Peter Pond Trading Post, and Little Red River Park (Omani *Wahpeton Dakota Nation* 88).

It is important to note these places and transparently acknowledge how Métis and other peoples have participated in the displacement of Indigenous peoples such as the Dakota from traditional campsites. As early as the 1800s, Métis families from the Great Lakes began to gather to the Forks and beyond to Ile à la Crosse, Lac Ste-Anne, and MacKenzie River District. By the mid-19th Century, Red River Métis had established *hivernements* or wintering camps all along the bison range passage from Lac La Biche in the northwest, to the forks of the Saskatchewan River along the South Branch, to Rat River southeast of Fort Garry (Payment 22; Brackley n.p.). In 1870, *nehiyawak* First Nations leaders expressed serious concerns to government representative Lieutenant Butler that recent people from “half-breed settlements” were poisoning foxes and wolves with strychnine, which was spreading and killing horses and dogs belonging to First Nations groups, so destroying not only their means of transportation and livelihood, but also relations (Christensen 141, 145). What’s more, in spring of 1873 the





having better and more nuanced conversations about this special place of exchange and relation. The only known biographer of James Isbister, David Smyth, writes that, “The James Isbister family clearly demonstrates the importance of kinship in Métis social life and settlement patterns” (658). My own examination of his life has certainly found that to be true, even after the political uprising of 1885. This place in particular, this Gathering Place, is traditionally a place of community-building, kinship, exchange, and celebration.

Like many Métis, James had worked in the Saskatchewan Valley region his whole life, between Norway House, Cumberland House area, and the forks — besides his childhood education in Red River which was typical of the children of HBC employees at that time (Smyth 654-6). James Isbister (age 26) and Maggie Bear (age 19) were married on New Year’s Day, Jan 1st, 1859 at “Nepowewin Station,” now called Nipawin, near Fort à la Corne, during a quick five-day visit James made from his post at Carlton House (Smyth 657; Watson 17). Nipawin is about fifteen minutes away from where I currently sit typing, while a torrent of rain pours over the window beside me. Adding strength to my argument that James and Margaret were not necessarily the first people ever to “settle” in the area, Margaret Bear and her family were already living in the area at Fort à la Corne as of 1859. More research into journals needs to be done as to how exactly they met, whether James already knew their family when he was a student in Red River or if he met them for the first time in the Saskatchewan District. But I do know from the scrip application of James Bear on behalf of his father that Margaret Bear’s parents—William Bear (Swampy Cree/Métis) and Margaret Tait/Tate (Scotch Métis)—married in Red River in 1832, but had moved indefinitely up to the Saskatchewan District by 1856 when William Bear was hired by the HBC as a carpenter for four years. William thereafter spent most of his time between Prince Albert and Fort Carlton until his death in 1875 (“Bear” 272).

In terms of the kinship connections the Bears brought to the Saskatchewan forks, John Badger and Baptiste Spence both attest on the scrip to William Bear having “always lived the same mode of life as half breeds” and “has always been known to be a half breed” (“Bear” 272; Hall “Tate/Tait”). He was also Swampy Cree, and had travelled down to Red River around 1810 on an epic journey with his parents, *wâpask* (White Bear or Polar Bear) and his wife *akînasom* from the York Factory area (Asham 1). Margaret Tate/Tait, William Bear’s wife, was also *nehiyaw-âpihtawikosisân*, the daughter of Scotchman James Tate/Tait and “Sarah,” identified as “either an Indian, probably a Cree, or a half-breed” (Hall “Tate/Tait”; Asham 1-2). According to common practice, Margaret Tate/Tait’s brother William “Wallack” Tate/Tait married William Bear’s sister, Mary Bear, down in Red River as well; however, they stayed in Red River with *wâpask* and *akînasom* while William Bear and Margaret (Tate/Tait) Bear moved to the Saskatchewan District with their children. The Bear family is a great example of the kinds of

complex kinship networks and cultural influences that formed ties between First Nations and *otipemisiwak* in the Saskatchewan District.

On the other side of the family, James Isbister was *otipemisiwak* with English-Scotch and *nehiyawak* heritages as well, born November 29th, 1833 at Nelson River (“Iastawitch-Isbister” 450). His father was a Scotchman—John Isbister, who held a “low company rank” as an HBC Interpreter and Postmaster from Orkneys—and his mother was Fanny Sinclair, born in “about 1813 in Red River area” (Smyth 653-4). Some speculation as Fanny’s parents exists, due to inconsistencies in her scrip records. While Fanny’s 1885 scrip application cites Margaret “Nahovway” Sinclair and William Sinclair as her parents, Sutherland speculates that Fanny’s mother was another Cree woman who also took the name Margaret, likely the wife of “Aissayseepeau”; she was possibly named “Chamathim” (Sutherland 194). Whatever the case, the Elders tell us James Isbister was a “Scotch Halfbreed” and “a smart man dat Jimmy” (Campbell *Stories of the Road Allowance People* 105-6). Métis oral history confirms was educated in Red River, which was common for the children of Hudson’s Bay Company employees, and it is well known that he spoke fluent English, *nehiyawewin*, *na-dené*, Gaelic, and Michif (Campbell *The Road Allowance People* 106; Smyth 654).

He was a “champion long distance dog runner for Hudson’s Bay Company” and almost broke a record by making it from Touchwood Hills to Fort Carlton in one day but had an accident coming down the hill at Batoche “where the trail crossed the river” (Code 49-50). Almost a year after he married Maggie Bear, the Ninth Earl of Selkirk recalls Isbister travelling from Fort Pitt to Red Deer Hill in *kistapinânihk* close to the South Branch by dog-sled to join them for supper on November 8th, 1859, and he stayed with them until the next morning (Southesk 293). Carnegie notes that Isbister’s dogsled was drawn by “four very handsome dogs—for whom he had been offered a pair of good horses, but he knew the value of his team too well to part with it” (Southesk 293). Carnegie also recalled a story Isbister told him about his journey to Red Deer Hill that day. On his way to Red Deer Hill, Isbister came upon an elderly Indigenous woman on a journey who had stopped for the night but could not light a fire in the extreme cold due to the failure of her matches. Carnegie says, “Strange to say, Mr. Isbister had no matches with him, but to make up for the disappointment he very kindly lent her his buffalo robe” (Southesk 293-4). While James worked for HBC he also taught school in the summers to Indigenous children living along the old river trade network at Norway House, Grand Rapids, Cross Lake, White Fish Lake, and Battleford before any permanent schools were built (Code 49).

### *A Complex Kinship Network Continues*

“Jimmy” and “Maggie” settled in to start farming at what would become Isbister Settlement in 1862, in a place where they were surrounded by family. As I mentioned earlier, Margaret’s parents lived between Prince Albert and Carlton from 1859 until 1875. According to scrip, at least six of Margaret’s siblings and their families remained in *kistapinânihk* area until at least 1886: James Bear with his spouse Amelia Thomas at Prince Albert, Joseph Bear with his spouse Maria Beads at South Branch, Philip Bear with his spouse Mary Caroline Emo at South Branch, Nancy Bear with her spouse Alexandre Landry at Prince Albert, Thomas Bear at South Branch, and Henry Bear at Prince Albert (“Hall “Tate/Tait”; Smyth 658; *Rebellion N.W.T. 1885* 5). At least five of James’s siblings and their families also joined them: Adam Isbister with his wife Helena Ellen Smith earliest in 1863, George Isbister with his wife Mary Jane Anderson, Robert Miles with his first wife Margaret Dreaver, and his widowed sister Elizabeth Isbister who arrived in 1869 before re-marrying to Eugene Derby and moving back to Manitoba 1881 (“Iastawitch-Isbister” 458; “Isbister” 198, 223, 243, 243; *Rebellion N.W.T. 1885*; *Census of Canada, 1881*, North West Territories; *Census of Canada, 1881*, Manitoba; Still; “NWHB child” 13).

By 1871, *kistapinânihk* had a population of 166—all of them Métis except for 20 settler peoples (Code 64). By the end of the 1870s, there were several hundred, still mostly *otipemisiwak*. It wasn’t until the early 1880s that settler peoples came to rival the majority Métis population in *kistapinânihk* (Smyth 21). In the meantime, ᐃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃ had spread out in a variety of settlements along the river highways of the *kisiskâciwani-sîpiy* and *wâwâskesiw-sîpiy* (or North and South Saskatchewan Rivers) between the 1860s and 1880s (Fig. 3). Settlements along the North Branch included the Isbister Settlement of course, and Lindsay District (Pocha’s Settlement) upriver to the west. The “South Branch” settlements along the South Saskatchewan included Halcro (St. Andrew’s), Red Deer Hill, St. Louis, St. Laurent, Batoche, and Duck Lake. Mingling and intermarriage between settlers and Métis, between Métis of different communities, and between First Nations and Métis was common before the institution of the pass-permit system in 1885. Due to the disappearance of the buffalo and traditional subsistence, *ahthâhkakoop* had chosen a more permanent land base to cultivate for the survival of his people at Sandy Lake along the Green Lake Trail, to the northeast of Prince Albert, in fall of 1874 (Christensen 175). By the time Treaty 6 was signed in 1876, many First Nations groups in the area already had houses and gardens at the spot they would choose for reserve lands – *ayahtaskamikinam* (William Twatt) at Sturgeon Lake, John Smith (of Muskoday) along the South Branch below Red Deer Hill, and so so on (Christensen 300-1). Both *ahthâhkakoop* and *mistawasis* had daughters that married Hudson’s Bay men; *ahthâhkakoop*’s daughter Mary married Edward Genereux who worked at Fort Carlton in the 1860s, and *mistawasis*’s daughter “Margeurite” married Fort Carlton Orkneyman trader James Dreaver/

Drever, and they lived together at River Lots 1 West and 1 East in Prince Albert from 1874 to at least 1881 with their children (Christensen 734; *Census of Canada, 1881*, North West Territories; Canada 36; ). *ah tâhkakoop*'s brother *ahenakew* spent at least part of the winter in Prince Albert over the winter of 1874-5 with his wife *kîskanakwâs* (Cut Sleeve) (Christensen 136, 183). Three of *ahenakew* and *kîskanakwâs*' children were also baptized in Prince Albert at St. Mary's March 21st, 1875 (Christensen 183).

While they waited for the Indian Department to fill their request to buy a mill, and subsequently when it broke down, *ah tâhkakoop*'s people often made the 100-mile trip to Prince Albert to have their grain gristed at the closest mill in the area in 1883, 1884, 1887, and 1894 (Christensen 358, 444-5, 607, 662). In 1877 and 1880, in the spring when sap started flowing, some families including *ahenakew*'s travelled to a spot "possibly near an island in the North Saskatchewan River near Prince Albert" where there was a particular grove of maples to have a "sugar" camp (Christensen 315, 398). Because they were along the Green Lake Trail, *ah tâhkakoop*'s people were also often in contact with *otipemisiwak* traders and relations, at least until Fort Carlton burned in 1885 (Christensen 537). In good years for game, it was common for traders to just stay at Sandy Lake (Christensen 317). John Hines, a Protestant minister who lived with *ah tâhkakoop* and his people at Sandy Lake, often hired workers such as carpenters from Prince Albert, and *ah tâhkakoop* travelled to Prince Albert to buy supplies such as shingles and lumber which he did in 1884 (Christensen 325-6, 466). Between Métis of different communities, Code also gives the example that Charles Fidler of St. Catherine's married Harriet Pocha of the Pocha Settlement (Lindsay District), and Joseph Hodgson of St. Catherine's married Elizabeth Halcro of Halcro Settlement (22). Some settler men married Métis women, such as Scotsman James Mackie who married Harriet Anderson, and Patrick Thorpe who married Margaret Bear of St. Peter's Manitoba. Non-Indigenous man Thomas Scott married James and Margaret Isbister's daughter, Mary Jane. Scott "came to identify strongly with their people," and signed as witness to the scrip applications of almost every child of James and Margaret Isbister, as well as to baptisms and burials (Code 27, 28).

## **Subversive Dress in the Northwest**

### *The Isbister-Bear Family Portraits: Feathers and Ruffles and Hats*

The *otipemisiwak* communities in *kistapinânihk*, mostly made up of people who were born and raised in the Saskatchewan District fur trade, or moved up from Red River area, and would have been heavily influenced by Hudson Bay Company and Red River culture and tastes.



Fig. 4. James Isbister and family members, circa 1882. There is some debate about who the women and girls in this series are. The inscription on the back of this photo lists them as the daughters of James and Margaret: Mary Jane (left) and Christina Anderson (right) sitting, with the smaller children in their laps, Minnie (left), and Nancy (right). James Isbister stands at the back. The poor quality of the photo however makes these names difficult to verify until more photos can be found.





Fig. 5. This photo is captioned “James Isbister, his wife and part of his family” in Ross Innes’s *The Sands of Time*. There is some debate in my family about whether or not this is Margaret Bear in this photo holding the child. It is likely not Margaret Bear. However, my grandma said the little boy looked like “little Jo”—Joseph Isbister. If little Jo (b. 1878) is about 4 years old in this picture, this series may have been taken roughly around 1882. James Isbister is definitely standing at back, however more photos need to be discovered to verify the identities of the women. It is possible that daughters Mary Jane (b.1866), Christina Anderson (b.1867), Nancy Isbister (b.1874), and Eliza Pruden (b.1876) appear in this photo.



Fig. 6. Mary Jane Flett with her husband Benjamin Isbister—younger brother to James Isbister—and their daughter, taken in the 1880s.

Still, I was very surprised at the family’s dress in a series of family photos of James Isbister and family possibly taken around 1882 (Fig. 4 & 5). Mary Jane Isbister’s (née Flett) fitted and buttoned style of dress photographed in the 1880s, although with less flamboyant accessories, is similar to those worn in the Isbister-Bear family portraits, which gives me some confidence the latter was also taken in the same decade at least. The whole Isbister-Bear family looks quite different from the typical family portraits of austere and almost ascetic Métis families I have seen. To the contrary, the Isbister-Bears rather look quite affluent and flamboyant, with the older girls wearing beautiful hats tipped just so, with lace and ruffles around their necks and wrists and one or two layers of long ruffles along the bottoms of their skirts. The oldest girl wears a light coloured dress, the opposite of the austere black dresses with big crosses many Métis women are pictured wearing in the 1880s to early 1900s. Racette attributes the typical affinity of Métis women for dark fabrics and shawls at the end of the 19th Century to “an intense period of family and community loss,” as well as Catholic devotion as families moved to mission settlements (Racette *Sewing Ourselves Together* 120).



Belcourt reflects on the austere manner of dress of many 19th-20th Century Métis women as an expression of loss and trauma in their lives. She recounts the life of a “Mrs. Tate from Fort Carleton” in 1859. Whether this could be my ancestor Margaret Bear (née Tait/Tate, mother of Margaret Bear) who was stationed there with William Bear by 1859, or a relative of hers, her description makes sense of the propensity many *otipemisiwak* women had for the Victorian “elaboration of mourning” (Racette *Sewing Ourselves Together* 120):

Mrs. Tate’s dad was shot by a renegade Métis family, her husband was shot by Blackfoot, and then she turns up in records at treaty negotiations, then the Cypress Hill Massacre and then at the Battle of Batoche. That was her life for 50 years. That was the life of many Métis women. No wonder they started wearing black and big crosses! Then you look at the beadwork and it is joyous and exuberant. That is exactly what Métis women have done for generations, part of that process of creating beauty is healing yourself and it’s therapeutic. I think it’s a form of prayer. (*Beadwork* 18)

For this Mrs. Tate, although we don’t know more about her, we know that she was consistently met with the deaths of her loved ones. Even so, her private and healing *mîkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) practice remained colourful and alive.

Margaret Isbister (née Bear) too had experienced great loss in her life, with the premature deaths of her seven of her children by 1882. While I have not yet verified whether Margaret Isbister-Bear appears in the photo series under discussion, the ladies of the family are certainly decked out, even with an ostrich feather in one of their hats. Perhaps owing to their Scottish Protestant rather than French Catholic community and influences, or perhaps indicating their fun and fashionable youth, or simply just in a demonstration of Saskatchewan valley affluence, they wear lace and feathers instead of black with crosses. James Isbister wears a vest and overcoat with a tie. He also appears to be wearing a thin fingerwoven Métis sash tied around his hips as a belt, with either a short fringe or its fringe tied up into a knot. No one appears to be wearing beadwork or hide, and there is not even an appearance of the tartan shawl which the majority of *otipemisiwak* women are photographed wearing later at the 1900 Northwest Scrip Commission, which Hudson’s Bay ledgers show would have been available to the Saskatchewan Valley certainly by 1881 (Fig. 7 & 11) (“Hudson’s Bay Company Ledger–Touchwood Hills, 1877”).

A study of Red River Dress by Aileen McKinnon offers further insight as to the precedent of the Isbister-Bear family finery in this early 1880s family photo series. She notes that Protestant Métis in 1835 in Red River preferred “fancy coloured silk handkerchiefs” whereas Roman Catholic Métis preferred black silk handkerchiefs (34). Her study also showed it was primarily Roman Catholic Métis who purchased beads between 1815 and 1835 (35). McKinnon quotes Alexander Ross who wrote, in his analysis of Red River in 1856 titled *The Red River*

*Settlement: its rise, progress, and present state*, that DNVΓ'◁\ women had a “shopping propensity and love of fineries.” I am reminded of the Earl of Southesk’s distinction later on in 1859 between the “Red River style” and the more flamboyant and “freer” “Saskatchewan style” (50). He described Red River style as darker and subtler. The men wore dark blue with dark fur hats, with a bright sash and embroidered leggings to break up the “monotony,” and the women wore a dark blanket or shawl with sometimes a bright handkerchief (*Racette Sewing Ourselves Together* 100). Leather and fringed clothing however became more prominent as they moved into Saskatchewan, as well as Scotch bonnets, blue caps and broad-brimmed white hats “covered with streamers of ribbon of different colour,” the wide-brimmed black Spanish hat, felt hats coiled with fox skins, a peaked white flannel cap decorated with a strip of scarlet cloth or with an eagle feather, and a hat wrapped with fur, peaked with leather, and decorated with a red ostrich feather (*Racette Sewing Ourselves Together* 101-103). With this in mind, perhaps it is true that the overarching freer, flamboyant “Saskatchewan style” had some effect on the Isbister-Bears, as well as their association with the English-speaking Anglican community.

McKinnon also argues that there was a stronger connection to European-style dress for families with European-influenced education (56). By 1835 in in Red River, those wearing moccasins rather than shoes were considered “lower class by the other settlers” (McKinnon 56). Families connected with the HBC also had the ability to directly order garments straight from Britain, from another settlement, or even through the American trade routes (McKinnon 54). Payment also notes how, after the 1870s, European clothes had replaced “traditional mid-19th-century clothes” in Batoche (45). This growing emphasis on European dress could have only been strengthened by the racist structure of the HBC, where employees considered “half-breeds” could never rise to the the same positions as their European counterparts (Smyth 656). Even so, Payments writes that older Métis continued to wear arrow sashes after 1870, and women set themselves apart by wearing big silk kerchiefs on their chests, and wool shawls over their shoulders or heads for going outside. Summarizing Louis Goulet, Payment also says, “The Métis were proud and always well dressed”; the people of Red River “dressed according to the latest Montréal or St. Paul fashions.” On the other hand, winterers in the northwest dressed more traditionally and practically and—for the women—more severely and modestly (Payment 46).

It appears that the Isbister-Bears, a Protestant, prominent, and successful family by the early 1880s with a semi-permanent dwelling and position of political leadership, threw off the traditional *otipemisiwak* styles of dress. But things aren’t always as they seem. While this family photo series doesn’t show Isbister wearing a buffalo robe, or the costume he might wear while freighting or driving the dog train, Isbister is pictured here wearing his sash—the mark of a Métis accustomed to the work of freighting, trading, hunting, and working in the Northwest Territories. Pairing likely his finest suit and proudly displaying his sash, Isbister purposefully

signals his role as a Métis son educated at St. John's College in Red River, who has worked in the Saskatchewan Valley most of his life. At the time this photo was likely taken, Isbister was petitioning to the federal government for *otipemisiwak* rights, and working with Louis Riel to join the French-speaking and English-speaking Métis for one cause. As Code argues, he remained proud of his Métis identity in pursuit of a "separate political organization along with closer ties to the French Métis" in a "pan-Métis nationalism" (71).

### *Power, Scarcity, and Popularization of European Dress*

I am reminded of a photograph of Maria Campbell's great-grandmother Maria's family, which she shared in "Ni'wahkomakanak: All My Relations." Campbell's family members are likewise shown all shown wearing European-style dresses and suits in what could be the late 1890s, despite all of them being Cree-Métis and many of them being well-known practitioners of traditional *nehiyaw-âpihtawikosisanak* medicine and oral historians. I am also reminded of how both my mother and grandmother each have a pair of handmade hide moccasins hidden in their closets, which I have never seen them wear. My grandmother, her siblings, and mother were never allowed to wear or own handmade hide moccasins by rule of her father, who was the son of two ᐅᑎᐅᑦᑲᑦ families, the Isbisters and the Whitfords ("Whitford, Mary Ann"; "Whitford, Philip; for Mary Spence"). While my grandma and her siblings were allowed to use dogsled and train spirited horses, the line was drawn at material culture and the closest they could get to moccasins was store-bought slipper moccasins. Conversely, our Euro-Canadian neighbours today—my grandparents' best friends who are old enough to have known my great-grandparents—often still wear their handmade moose hide moccasins. My grandfather, whose parents were Irish and English, also remembers himself and his father wearing moccasins as workwear in both winter and summer in *kistapinânihk* area. Why this irony?

Dress can be a survival strategy. In a society where the government is actively seeking to snuff out all resistance to federal takeover, cultural symbols are a sign of political difference, of pre-federal memory. In 1960s socialist Cuba, government "endorsed a straightforward connection between clothes or styles and political views." They attached "counterrevolutionary values to bourgeois fashion, and associated work clothes and constructivist sartorial designs with the proletariat as a class and socialism as ideology" (Arús 414). They sought to control Cuban dress and targeted anyone expressing individuality or being colourful due to their perceived political deviance. A study of fashion and naming practices by Obukhova et al. in Beijing after the onset of the Cultural Revolution also explores the great influence politics have over "cultural expression." They argue that, "by promoting forms of expression reflecting





*Stories of the Road Allowance People* recounts also that in some cases, if it wasn't taken, it was burned:

Dah Halfbreeds  
dey wasen rich you know  
dey jus gots a few little nice tings.  
When den soldiers come  
dey chase dah peoples away  
an dey go into dere howses  
an dey clean dem out.  
Dey even burn some of dah howses to dah groun.  
Day do dat to Gabe hees house you know.  
Burn it to dah groun. (103)

Those who had escaped the battle, or would later return from a prison sentence, would have little to return to, especially around the South Branch area. Precious items and heirlooms of value such as *mikisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) would have been taken from homes, especially those close to the battle sites.

Campbell's story recalls how strangely, not only did the soldiers take valuables, they confiscated Métis sashes. She says:

I guess after day take Riel  
dah soldiers day catch up to dah peoples dat was running away  
an dey take all deer guns an bullets.  
An dah soldiers  
dey take dah ashes too.  
Boy dats funny issn it?  
why would dey take dah sashes? (53)

In the eyes of the military at least, the *ceinture fléchée* signalled not only national resistance—as a flag would—but personal resistance and individual expression of disobedience to the broader Canadian federal power. The Métis sash communicated to settler culture the continued relevancy of long-standing Indigenous kinship networks of subsistence and trade—a system which the federal government sought to crush and replace. Of course, this confiscation was a continuation of the British legacy of outlawing cultural symbols deemed “rebellious,” such as they did with the restriction of tartan in Scotland in the 1700s.

Indigenous peoples fled *kistapinânihk* following the conflict. Terry Atimoyoo from Little Pine First Nation says, “Once 1885 happened, everybody scattered” (Ledding). Some *otipemisiwak* escaped to the United States, went southwest to Calgary, west to St. Albert, or travelled along the old river routes and Red River trails to other settlements in the northwest, northeast, and beyond. The places the Scrip Commission of 1900 visited indicate some major destinations Métis dispersed to in the north: Devil's Lake, Green Lake, Grand Rapids, Snake

Plains, Ile á la Crosse. For those that stayed in the area after 1885, life was made hellish. Spyglass shares that, on reserves marked as “disloyal,” they were denied rations, their five dollars a year, and all things made of metal were taken away: axes, knives, guns, everything. Many starved. Mosquito’s reserve lost 50 children in one year; Grizzly Bear and Lean Man lost 80 to starvation (Ledding). First Nations peoples who had taken treaty were subjected to the tyrannical pass and permit system after 1885, causing greater isolation between First Nations, Métis, and settler peoples, and the decline of on-reserve business such as livestock production (Code 76-7; Bear 29). Canada’s mobilization of a large number of troops into the area also resulted in many of them settling in the area, increasing the military presence in the area and white settler paranoia of Aboriginal revolts (Code 76).

### *Cultural Continuity and Resistance in the Face of Divisive Government Tactics*

The Canadian government sent around a Royal Commission on Rebellion Losses in 1885 supposedly to report on and recompense people for lost livestock and damages during the resistance (Smyth 672). However, according to a study of James Isbister and his brothers Robert, George, and Adam, it seems that those who aligned with the Canadian forces received the best compensation compared to those related to the resistance. Those allied with the RCMP received more financial support. For example, James, who claimed \$542-\$650 for damages to his property while he was in prison only received \$25, but his brother Adam, who volunteered in the force against Riel got a comparatively better return: \$160 claimed and \$22 paid (Smyth 672). Claimants living at Prince Albert claimed a total of over \$748 680 in damages, and were paid out less than half, \$316 216 (*Rebellion N.W.T. 1885*). This was a financial hit to those who were perceived as being “disloyal” to the government, pitting even family members against each other.

The government finally passed an 1885 order-in-council to begin sending out a series of scrip commissions to the northwest (Robinson). James Isbister took scrip in 1885. Documents show that Margaret’s siblings Nancy, Henry, and James Bear were discharged from John Smith band (Muskoday) to take scrip in 1886 and 1887 (“Bear” 268-271, 281-2, 306-309). Her other siblings Maria Kipling of Manitoba, Philip, Thomas, and Joseph of South Branch however did not take scrip, and the latter three names — as well as Henry Bear’s name, interestingly enough — appear as signees to a petition on behalf of John Smith Reserve in 1898 (“Personnel File Regarding Hilton Keith’s Appointment” 119). When withdrawing from treaty, James Bear, while citing his address as “Prince Albert,” had to agree to this statement: “I hereby agree to abandon my house to give up all right to any Cattle Implements . . . and agree not to live on the

Mistawasis Reserve + give up all rights to all Treaty rights without any compensation” (“Bear” 282). This is interesting because it shows the interconnectedness of family between Prince Albert and the surrounding reserves. *mistawasis* Reserve was to the Northwest of Prince Albert, with Muskoday along the South Branch, and Prince Albert between them, with relatives at all of these places. While many Métis and First Nations who were disillusioned by the results of treaty took scrip, scrip would unfortunately turn out to be a case of “widespread fraud” due to scrip speculation and disorganization (Goyette 80). S.T. St. John describes a Mr. Brown who kept a “safe full to overflowing with Indian [metis] scrip,” which he literally made millions of dollars off of (St. John 24). Countless Métis in the northwest took scrip, including entire *otipemisiwak* communities along the North and South Branches, which left many Métis financially devastated after this time.

Due to the failure of the scrip system, many Métis were forced to become “road allowance people,” as they were referred to by settlers (Adam). Many Métis scattered from *kistapinânihk* to the far northwest or closer by at Snake Plain, Mont Nebo, *mistawasis*, and *ahtâhkakoop* Reserve areas. Those living at River Lots in Prince Albert, such as James and Maggie and their *otipemisiwak* neighbours—the Fidlers, Andersons, and Sandersons—continued to do so, with little shifting here and there. Soon however, Margaret Bear left James Isbister to go live with one of her son, possibly Richard Hardisty Isbister who had moved to Snake Plain/*mistawasis* area just south of Ahtahkakoop Reserve, despite two of her other children still living at St. Catherine’s, Joseph and Minnie (“Image 211”; Isbister, Florence Hannah). Margaret Bear passed away in 1895 at the young age of 53 and is buried today on Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation land. A year later, an altercation with the drunken Sandy Lake farm instructor William J. O’Donnell, who had a history of violence and alcohol abuse, was witnessed by men from Ahtahkakoop Reserve during threshing at the farm of the eldest Isbister son Richard Hardisty (who never took scrip) (Christensen 676-7). After the tumultuous and socially and politically confusing events involving the making of Treaty 6 and subsequent uprising, it is no surprise that pressures, which continue today, were put on methods of individual expression—which could single one out as a government target or dissenter—in the public lives of Métis people, such as references to traditional dress.

Even in the midst of such pressures however, people—and their dress—are far more nuanced and complex in their subversive possibilities. The government outlawed elements of the Sun Dance and Give Away Dance, and passed laws to prevent First Nations people from visiting other reserves (Christensen 649-50). As Christensen reflects however, the more the government “cracked down,” the more interest in ceremony was renewed (649). Grass Dances were held at Beardy’s, Give Away and Sun Dances were held at Whitefish Lake, Pelican Lake, and Sturgeon Lake just north of *kistapinânihk* (Christensen 649). In tandem, Hudson’s Bay



ledgers also show that a lot of beadwork was being done. The Prince Albert 1888 Trading Post ledger shows that “Indian sashes,” as well as glover needles, sharp needles, shiny beads, brass beads, small blue beads, necklace beads, seed beads, braid, and ribbon were being bought by customers such as the South Branch Treaty Outfit, Duck Lake, the “Sturgeon Lake Outfit,” “Kie shik wan afoe,” James Dreaver/Drever, and R. Beatty. Other popular items included “clan tartan” shawls, “shld tart shawls,” velvet pile shawls, tweed, print fabric, white duffel, union plaid, blue stroud, red stroud, white stroud, striped blankets, capots, and a few pairs of moccasins (“Trading Post Ledger 1888”).

While First Nations and Métis peoples were increasingly discouraged from celebrating their material and non-material cultures and belief system following the 1885 resistance, many continued to celebrate their way of life, but in more underground ways. Marjorie Kelly’s 2003 study of T-shirts in Hawaii shows how even variances in something so subtle as T-shirt style shades and logos clearly identify individuals on the islands to local students as belonging to one of four distinct groups: local, Native Hawaiian, surfer, and tourist (198). If even t-shirts can display cultural identity, variance in the subtle choices an ᐃᑎᖃᑦᑦᑦ family may make when styling what seem to be their simply European-style clothing then might also provide such nuanced identifiers to local peoples.

### *Style of the Dispossessed: ᐃᑎᖃᑦᑦᑦ at the 1900 Northwest Scrip Commission*

With the knowledge that even the most mundane clothing item can communicate cultural influences, I turn to an album of 153 photos taken by Commissioner Narcisse-Omer Côté at almost every site of the the 1900 Northwest Scrip Commission sittings. While individuals applying for scrip in 1900 are not photographed wearing any of the stereotypical highly decorative Red River Métis items such as beaded octopus bags, fire bags, smoking caps, or leggings covered in ribbon work, many continued to wear moccasins and the sash for the occasion. In fact, I counted fifteen sashes and fifteen pairs of moccasins that were visible in the photographs, worn by people of all ages—children, adults, and elderly men. Payment asserts that it was mostly the older generation who continued to wear the arrow sash and other traditional garments at least in Batoche area at the turn of the Century, and this appears to be true in photos taken in the South Branch area, such as at Duck Lake (Fig. 10) (Payment 45). However, the frequent appearance of these items on people of all ages, especially the further the Commission got from Batoche and Duck Lake—such as at Snake Plain, Onion Lake, and Grand Rapids—shows that traditional garb may have been more common or acceptable than previously thought for all generations, at least north of the South Branch communities. One particular man

photographed wearing a sash and glasses, taken at Snake Plain, is Jacob Johnston/Johnstone, who became chief of *mistawasis* First Nation a few years later between 1904 and 1915, and became a medicine man and elder in the Presbyterian church (Johnston; *Image of Chief Jacob Johnstone (Kah-kee-ka-pow)*). In a later photographic portrait, held at the Saskatoon Public Library History Room, he is shown wearing the chief's jacket, treaty medals, and with a sash still around his waist (*Image of Chief Jacob Johnstone (Kah-kee-ka-pow)*). All of these factors demonstrate the flexibility of *otipemisiwak* identity, First Nations-Métis kinship, and continuity of traditional cultural symbols through the twentieth century in the Northwest.

Another interesting element of the Côté photographs is the frequency of plaid and tartan, which appeared the most—thirty five times—on dresses and shawls. Less frequent were solid-coloured shawls, which appeared sixteen times, and five striped shawls were also visible. Métis Knowledge Keepers at *kistapinânihk* note that the shawl is “a symbol of Metis identity and culture,” and a reference to their family connection with the Hudson Bay Company (Dorion 8). The ubiquitous appearance of tartan and plaid shawls worn over the shoulders and heads of many women, especially in along the HBC trade routes connected with *kistapinânihk*, may have been reference to the Scottish heritages of many Métis in the area, like the scotch bonnet which was popular in Saskatchewan country when the Earl of Selkirk came through in 1860 (*Racette Sewing Ourselves Together* 101-103). In fact, the scotch bonnet also showed up worn by one man in the Côté photos at Red Deer Lake (“Group of Half Breeds, Red Deer Lake”). A Portrait of “Three Cree Women” taken at Prince Albert in 1900 also shows that plaid/tartan shawls were a shared element of style between First Nations and Métis women around that time (Fig. 8). Considering the association tartan, and other references to Scottish material culture, has to the rebellion of the Scottish Highlanders against Imperial rule, it is also possible its popularity following the 1885 conflicts could have been a coded reference to solidarity with the resistance of their Scottish ancestors against Imperial oppression. That, however, is a topic for a future paper. Another element deserving of its own exploration was the appearance of the same stripe and/or ruffle along the bottom of dresses I saw worn by one of the Isbister-Bear women in their family portrait (Fig. 4, 5, 7, 8, 10). This came up seven times in the Côté photos. While this may have seemingly been ‘the style’ at the time—since single, double, and multiple stripes and ruffles along the bottom of the skirt, often also paired with tartan, was popular in European and New York women’s dress between at least 1860 and 1890—this style certainly contributed to, and became encoded with, ribbon skirt teachings for Indigenous women at some point in the continuum of its popularity (Gorsline 151, 159, 163, 174, 195, 220). Métis Knowledge Keepers Leah Dorion and Bonny Johnson also noticed this, observing from research into archival photographs from the early 1800s to mid-1900s that the early Métis ribbon skirt was “known for its use of a ruffle on its bottom.” They write that “the younger Métis girls and women had



Fig. 7. Côté, Narcisse-Omer. "At Devil's Lake." 1900. 8236, ID No. 1, Shelf 1. Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert.

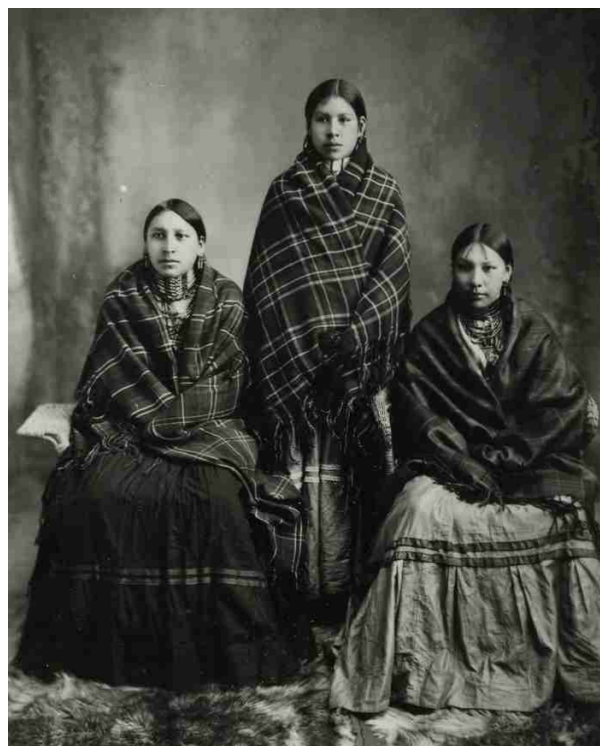


Fig. 8. "Three Cree Women." 1900. Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-B1627, ID 23778, Prince Albert.



Fig. 9. Côté, Narcisse-Omer. "Indian woman & twins Green Lake." 1900. 8236, ID No. 1, Shelf 1, 23. Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert.



Fig. 10. Côté, Narcisse-Omer. "Duck Lake." 1900. 8236, ID No. 1, Shelf 1, 23. Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert.





Fig. 11. Côté, Narcisse-Omer. "Send off to the Half-Breed Commission, Grand Rapids." 1900. 8236, ID No. 1, Shelf 1, 47. Bill Smiley Archives,

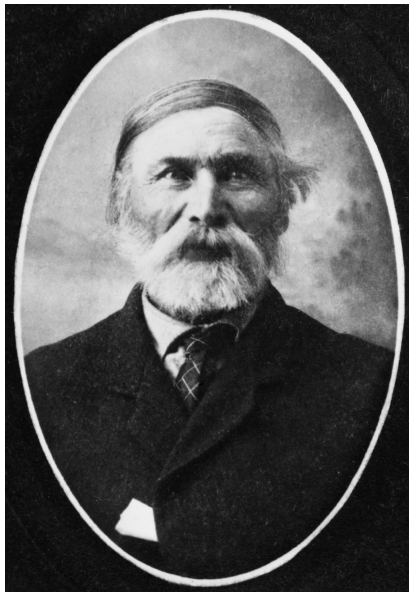


Fig 12. Official portrait of James Isbister



Fig 13. Crop of Côté's "Send off to the Half-Breed Commission, Grand Rapids," showing James Isbister.



Fig 14. Côté, Narcisse-Omer. “On the Trail to Green Lake.” 1900. 8236, ID No. 1, Shelf 1, 36. Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert.

smaller ruffles and sometimes had up to three ruffles placed” which had “the same visual appeal as the hide fringe that was located at the bottom of traditional hide dresses” (Dorion and Johnson 8). However, beyond acknowledging these elements of North Saskatchewan Métis material culture here, further discussion of them will have to be reserved for a future project.

This paper rather focuses on the almost complete absence of *mîkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) in the N.O. Côté photographs. The only visible appearance of traditional beadwork is seen on three of four pairs of moccasins worn by men at Onion Lake, which could alternatively be embroidery. Two of the sets are wraparound moccasins with a single stripe of contrasting colour along the vamp seam. The third set has a delicately small floral motif which is difficult to make out. Otherwise, most moccasins that appear in the Côté photos are unadorned, and plaid and tartan seem to have taken the place of handcrafted decorative work. For example, rather than having moss bags decorated with beaded flowers as is commonly seen in museum collections, a photograph of a woman at Green Lake identified as “Marie Hodson, née Mercredi” shows her twin babies in moss bags decorated with nothing but the pattern of the

plaid fabric they are made from (Fig. 6). Métis settlements along the South Branch however appear to favour more solid dark fabric shawls over tartan or plaid ones.

Looking closely at these photos, I also noticed something else I didn't expect. I saw my great-great-great grandfather James Isbister staring back at me in one of the photos taken at Grand Rapids (Fig. 11 & 12). He was standing in the centre of the photo, between the women in the forefront and the men behind, looking stately in a light-coloured coat and matching hat, with a white beard below his very recognizable cheekbones. Well, what on earth was he doing way over there? According to all the reports written about him, he was supposed to be living out his final years "in documentary obscurity" as Smyth says, in defeat at River Lot 17 in Prince Albert, which he held title to until around 1907 (658, 672). I found however in his scrip records that he applied for scrip on behalf of his deceased children at Grand Rapids ("Isbister" 216). The Annual Indian Affairs Report for that year also confirms his life did go on and he was there teaching school to the local children at Grand Rapids between 1900 and 1902 apparently with "energetic and exemplary influence." He also conducted services in the English church there, "of which denomination," the report says, "all the members of the band are adherents" (*Sifton Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended June 30, 1902* 181). The 1901 census also lists Isbister as living there as a teacher with his youngest son, fourteen-year-old "B.K.M. Isbister" (Benjamin Knipe Matheson Isbister, named for Métis Reverend E. K. Matheson of St. Catherine's) ("A Copy of an Original Inscription"). The document filled out in Grand Rapids contrasts with other censuses in that it describes Isbister's skin colour as "R", his tribal origin is "Cree S. B.", and his mother tongue as "Cree" (*Census of Canada, 1901*). While other censuses don't ask explicitly for skin colour and mother tongue, the census taken ten years later does ask for racial origin and language "commonly spoken", under which James is listed in Prince Albert as "Scotch" with "E" or English as the language he commonly speaks (*Census of Canada, 1911*). Discrepancy in government documents between labels such as "Halfbreed", "R", "Scotch", "Cree", shows that identity—especially in the Saskatchewan Valley post-contact—is often responsive and fluid. This fluidity is continuous with later Métis social identification. I think of the Métis beadworker Mrs. Philomene Umpherville in Brochet, Manitoba, who Michelle Stephanie Tracy says in the 1970s "was likely to slip from one role to another as the social situation warranted." Tracy writes that "she variously presented herself as Cree, French, or Métis, all of which on one level or another she could legitimately claim to be" (89). Tracy writes that Mrs. Umpherville "sees herself as legitimately all of the above and could see no reason, until recently, to limit her identity. In many ways, she manipulates her identity in response to the expectation of the person with whom she was interacting" (89-90). Thinking back to the Métis as both a nation (with internal norms) and people (with external inter-societal norms), this fluid

manner of identification is a response to external pressures, what seems to be a norm developed for self-preservation in inter-society interaction.

Material culture and dress reflects this fluidity of identity expression as a Métis person goes through life. Isbister's appearance in the Grand Rapids photo is quite crisp, perhaps to reflect his role in the community as teacher and conductor of church services. He is the only one in the photo dressed in a light suit, and the only one with their suit buttoned up all the way, his hat not even cocked. In his planned formal family portrait some fifteen years prior, his jacket was open to reveal his arrow sash, and his tie was even a little askew (Fig. 4-5). By 1900 however, even on a day when perhaps he didn't know he would be photographed, he appears far more formal. Most other men in the picture have their suits unbuttoned or casually open, a wear their hat with their own particular character. Just because he is dressed in a sharply European style doesn't mean however that he has turned his back on his Métis and *nehiyawak* heritage, culture, and relations. After Grand Rapids, Isbister went on to teach at Eagle Hills, closer to his land in *kistapinânihk*. The fact that Isbister continued to live his life travelling and teaching along the original waterway trade routes and cart trails after 1885, even while holding title to River Lot 17 in Prince Albert, demonstrates the continuity of *otipemisiwak* lifestyles in the Saskatchewan District.

Identifying Isbister in the Côté collection reveals the possible outcomes of comparing scrip with photos taken during the scrip commission: identifying individuals, genealogical information, location, and dress. A photo captioned "On the Trail to Green Lake" also lines up with the scrip of Robert Miles Isbister (younger brother to James Isbister by eight years) and his son James Dreaver Isbister, who were living at Snake Plain ("Isbister" 221-223). The scrip application lists "On the trail to Green Lake" as its specific location. There follows the likelihood that he is in the photos taken of the commission on the Green Lake Trail. But while I identified the continuity of the sash, shawl, and the use of the traditional river and cart trade routes in the Côté photographs of 1900, few examples of traditional beadwork were visible, as in the Isbister-Bear portrait of 1882. No traditionally beaded vests, coats, octopus bags, or other items associated with traditional Métis garb made it into these photographs as fancy showpieces for the scrip commission. While other items continued to be worn, did *mîkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) simply fall by the wayside for awhile? If beadwork is healing, and carries stories, teachings, and knowledge about our relations with human and non-humankind, as the earlier part of this essay demonstrated, where were their stories being kept? Where was their healing?

*Domestic Beadwork: Underground?*



While it may not have been as public, the stories were still being beaded, the healing was still being done. Hudson Bay Post Journals, photographs, and beadwork collections show that beadwork *was* still being made in the area by both First Nations and Dᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎ peoples even between the traumatic years of 1885 and 1900. A closeup of a photo by William John James taken on the frozen North Saskatchewan River at *kistapinânihk* between 1900 and 1905 reveals a highly embroidered or beaded hide jacket worn by a dog-runner (Fig. 15 & 16). James's assistant Theodore H. Charmbury also took many photographs of Dakota wearing beautiful beaded regalia for ceremony in and near Prince Albert in 1901 ("Four Sioux Indians pose at their camp, Prince Albert District, NWT"; "Sioux Dance"). Paulette Bear of Muskoday (where Margaret Bear's relatives were treaty), recalls beading with sinew thread being a very popular practice on-reserve into the 1880s (Bear 53-54). The piece of floral *mikisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) on indigo wool broadcloth Racette mentioned—a flowered table mat made from a recycled garment—was reportedly purchased from the Riel family at Prince Albert in 1885 (*Sewing Ourselves Together* 269). Angus McKay's family, who appears in many photographs only ever dressed in a European style, owned a beautiful saddle beaded with floral motifs now held at PAHS which he "obtained when working for the HBC." He also owned a sacred beaded pipe bag held in trust at PAHS which is not open for viewing, according to protocol. A photo of Angus McKay and family posing outside the Hudson's Bay Post in Île-à-la-Crosse later between 1908-09 shows one woman looking at Angus, wearing a traditionally beaded firebag or pipe bag on her belt (Crean).

Possibly around the same time, Angus McKay's auntie, Harriet Ann McKay (1835-1913), a Métis woman in Prince Albert of James Isbister and Margaret Bear's generation, may have also been working on the beaded tablecloth now held at PAHS (Fig. 17 & 18). This particular bright red tablecloth has foliage-shaped appliqué edged with two shades of pumpkin orange beads, lime green, white, and robin's egg blue beads on wool or stroud. Two groups of eight berries—clear beads encircled by two layers of white beads—are gathered at each corner of the table cloth, nestled in the leaves. This table cloth which donated by Gladys McKay to PAHS in 1985, recorded as "Made by Mrs. John Douglas McKay—Harriet Ann McKay in her later years."

With Harriet's family history, it would be easy to label this stroud table cloth as "Métis" and even break it down into "Scotch-Métis" or "Scotch, Métis, Swampy Cree." Harriet Ann McKay (c. 1835-1913) was the daughter of Scotch, Métis, and Swampy Cree parents Harriet Ballendine (1795-1854) and John "Little Bearskin" McKay (1792-1877) whose famous 1858 portrait at Red River, dressed in a fur hat, winter coat, leggings, and moccasins, can be seen in many articles about the *otipemisiwak* ("Portrait of John Richards"; Hall "MacKay/McKay"). Harriet Ann McKay's mother was educated in the first school at York Factory, and her father was sent to England for school (Hall "Ballenden/Ballendine"). Harriet Ann McKay was born a



Fig. 15. James, W. J. *Untitled*. Album #4, c. 1900-1905. 8245, 10, Shelf 1. Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

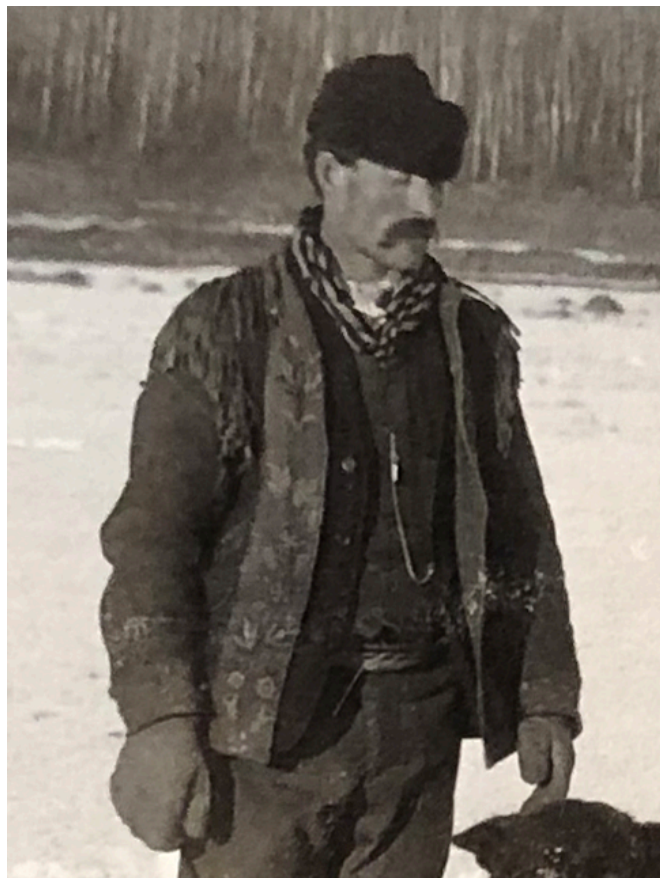


Fig. 16. James, W. J. *Untitled*, cropped. Album #4, c. 1900-1905. 8245, 10, Shelf 1. Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Society, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.



Fig. 17. Tablecloth beaded by Harriet Ann McKay in her final years, sometime before 1913.



Fig. 18. Detail of tablecloth beaded by Harriet Ann McKay in her final years, sometime before 1913.



daughter of the trade at Fort Ellice, and was married to “Half-breed” Interpreter and Freeman John Dugald/Dougall/Douglas McKay at St. James Church, Headingly in 1857 after being first country-wed to him in 1856 at Fort Pelly (“McKay, John Dugald ‘D’ (b.ca.1826)”). Harriet Ann became the auntie of many well-known Prince Albert Métis: Harriet Ann Traill (McKay); Catherine Clarke (McKay), who married Chief Factor Lawrence Clarke; Thomas McKay, the first mayor of Prince Albert; William McKay, HBC Chief Factor; George McKay, Archdeacon; and many others in their big family (Hall “MacKay/McKay”). One of Harriet and John’s sons was Joseph “Gentleman Joe” McKay, born at St. Andrew’s in Red River and employed as a scout, guide, and interpreter for the NWMP. He famously shot the first shot March 26th in 1885 at Duck Lake, killing elderly *nehiyaw* man “Assiyiwinn.” Gabriel Dumont also alleges Joseph McKay also shot his own cousin Isidore Dumont in that battle because he had “an interest” in killing him (Woodcock 182). So, Harriet Ann and her family were deeply associated trade and politics in the North-West, with both sides of the events of the Northwest uprising, and with elements of traditional Métis material and social culture.

While Harriet’s beaded tablecloth could sit under the discrete label of “Scotch Métis,” the more interesting thing in my view however is to ask: how did she see herself at the time that she made it? What did she make of the rebellion and her own son’s involvement? Why was she beading this bright and colourful table cloth in her final years—what did it mean to her to do that? Why a tablecloth rather than a wearable item? Was it a private act of celebration of her family, her history, her people, reserved only for those close enough to sit together around a table and feast? Was it something that could be shared by everyone, rather than made for solely one person? Did it simply signify the transition many Métis families made from using hunting regalia to more domestic lifestyles? Or was it so that it could be folded, hidden away, like  $\triangleright \cup \vee \Gamma \nearrow \triangleleft$  identity? Perhaps, like my family members, the brightly beaded and colourful “Saskatchewan style” of Métis trader culture, was no longer something publicly celebrated, but rather privately held in closets: internal rather than inter-societal.

Demonstrated but the colourful beadwork of women such as Harriet McKay, and the rarity of their beadwork in photographs of the same era, is a contrast between the public and private lives of Métis as government sought to disempower and assimilate them into other cultural groups since the first “Riel Rebellion” in 1869/70. Expressing and celebrating *otipemisiwak* identity visually became subject to changing laws about marriage and band membership, as well as survival in the midst of aggressively racist attitudes. This flexibility of identity, and the disbursement of Métis peoples across the country following 1885, makes pinning down specific styles and artists of Métis material culture in museum collections difficult. The task of pinning them to *kistapinânihk* specifically, with all its complex kinship connections and the continual movement of people through it to other points along the North

and South Saskatchewan Rivers, especially challenging. Maureen Matthews, Curator of Cultural Anthropology at Manitoba Museum, noted in her response to a questionnaire I sent out regarding collection practices of *otipemisiwak* artifacts, that the difficulty of attributing objects Métis cultural identity is just as complex as assigning people “Metis” cultural identity. She emphasizes the fluidity of Metis women’s identities through marriage, but the sustained importance of the maternal line, noting that the line between identities of First Nations and Metis labels is fluid, and place can be—but is not always—a good indicator of that identity. As an example, she uses the Norway House embroidery style between 1840-1890, done by both Métis and Cree embroiderers. She writes,

After railways reached the west, Norway House ceased to be a shipping hub for the fur trade, and these women moved all over the west. That style of silk-work went with them. So it is not just the style of the work it is the date it was made that helps to establish some sort of provenance and Metis identity. A style of work which was made before the Riel Resistance and can confidently be traced to Metis artists, might 20 years after the resistance, be the work of a woman who identifies as Cree in Buffalo Narrows. The work has as complex a genealogy as the artists. (Matthews)

She suggests the scholarly possibilities of tracing style and consistency changes through generations of women artists.

There is much of this kind of work yet to be done, to trace the dispersal of Métis and their First Nations kin out from points of conflict, their families, and their material culture and art. The RCMP Historical Collections Unit (RCU) began collecting Indigenous artifacts in 1934 and has accumulated approximately 685 Indigenous artifacts. They do not have record of when the RCU began to label artifacts as “Métis.” Criteria they use for the cultural attribution of an item is gathered from consultation with a donor and/or maker—“preferably with both if possible.” Manitoba Museum was incorporated in 1970 at which time it absorbed collections that had been gathered from as early as 1820. Maureen Matthews, Curator of Cultural Anthropology, told me “...On balance, we have relatively few named artists.” In 1994, the Hudson’s Bay Company donated its 25 000 artefacts to the Museum, half of which were Indigenous artefacts from as early as 1800. In 2020, there were over 12 000 Indigenous artefacts at Manitoba Museum, and in total the museum is home to about 25 000 Indigenous artefacts, excluding remains, grave goods, and human remains.

Matthews notes that artefacts have always had a “culture group” field, and Metis has been a possible entry but often followed by a “?” Or with other suggested cultural associations. In June of 2020, Manitoba Museum’s catalogue listed 70 items that could be possibly Métis or First Nations. Their culture attribution is often “First Nations ?; Metis ?”, “Dakota; Sioux; Metis” “Metis ? Cree ?”, but sometimes is only attributed to “Metis” (“Metis Beadwork Report (June

2020).” None of those items are attributed to Prince Albert area. As to criteria with which artefacts have been assigned the “culture group” “Métis,” Matthews has only been with the museum for the last ten years of its existence, but offers this insight into the way it has been classified:

It seems to me that the criteria were mainly stylistic or where related to the kind of object. For instance, we think most of our beaded saddles and beaded window valences are probably Metis as they were part of a distinctive life style that included horses and houses. We have worked closely with Dr. Sherry Farrell Racette [...] to identify a few uncredited artists. She helped us identify the work of Mary Sinclair Christie. (There is an article about her and three other women by Susan Berry of the RAM.) Mary’s very fine double chain stitch silk embroidery on caribou, and that of her daughters was typical of the kind of work done by Metis girls who attended schools in Red River before 1865. Sherry taught us to count bead colours, another indicator of a Metis artist, and there are many pieces we now think of as Metis thanks to her engagement with the collection, but I am doubtful whether these changes in the feeling we have toward these objects has been captured in the database.

Michelle Taylor, Curator/Manager of Prince Albert Historical Society told me that, to date, there are only 76 items listed in the PAHS catalogue from Indigenous individuals; however, she says there are many that have not yet been documented as such. She writes, “There are well over 200 items that could be considered Indigenous, including an archaeological collection from the Sturgeon Fort site that was an early trading post in the Prince Albert area”; however, the database has not been updated with this information. She writes that recording Indigenous artist names is a “relatively recent idea for the Historical Society.” Recent donations such as those in 2015 include this information, but artist names in older donations are spotty. The PAHS began labelling items as “Metis” in 2018, with the help of a Métis Knowledge Keeper. However, some times items have been labelled Métis previously if they were known to have come from Red River or belonged to historical Métis families. No written criteria for this has been used for this identification, but rather the experience of Knowledge Keepers with stylistic knowledge determine the cultural attribution of “Métis.”

What really struck me however was what Taylor wrote about the differing opinions of Prince Albert Historical Society Members on the inclusion of more Indigenous consultation and identification. She shared, “There has been an influx of acceptance of identifying Indigenous artefacts. That being said there has been some blow back from Society members who say we are doing too much to accommodate the Indigenous people in our stories. What I believe is that we are in the pendulum swing that will bring us to the centre where we will tell the whole story of Prince Albert, not just part of it” (Taylor). This was sad news to hear because it reveals a continued lack of awareness of the sheer depth of the stories of *kistapinânihk*, stories dating

back to the beginning of time. “The whole story” has often been limited to the comparatively small colonial narrative, beginning with the first European settler peoples.

*míkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) however is the evidence of the expansiveness of the rest of the story, a record of Indigenous survival, continuity, ingenuity, and strength. These artifacts are not simply dead things of the past, but they tie us—whose families survived the last 153 years—to the strength of this long history. They hold Indigenous stories, knowledges, they connect us to our family members, ancestors, reveal beauty in our past and future. They hold the potential to inspire new art, new philosophy, new fiction, to strengthen traditional teachings, responsibilities to our non-human and human community. They hold the power to mobilize, to ignite more creativity, more economy, more knowledge, to lecture on the art history that isn’t taught in fashion books. They are alive! Still, many historic Indigenous items from *kistapinânihk* and other regions however sit in basements and collections gathering dust, unbeknownst to the descendants of those who beaded or constructed them. As some feel the “pendulum” is swinging toward Indigenous histories, there is a fear of exclusion, erasure, or tarnishing of the stories of settler peoples as they lose the power to completely control the narrative of history. But, as Laura Beard says, the aim of telling stories from Indigenous perspectives, histories, and material culture histories, is not to tell a heroic story. The goal of investigating and shedding light on history is not to be in competition, but rather to see how we are all related, to see that we are all people deserving of respect and justice—by telling the truth. It should not be a pendulum at all in fact, but a circle. A circle with more circles within and without.

## Conclusion & Future Work

*otipemisiwak* material culture in *kistapinânihk* between 1862 and 1900 is the result of a complex kinship network rooted in pre-contact and contact relations, and spanning all across the traditional routes of the North-West. By the first “Red River Rebellion” of the 1869/70, many Métis styled themselves after the latest Montréal or St. Paul fashions rather than with hide garments. However, those who lived in Saskatchewan before the 1885 resistance seemed to take on a more flamboyant style, exemplified by a series of family photographs taken of the Isbister-Bear family circa 1882, in which they wear lace accessories, ribbons, and feathers. James Isbister’s formative role in *kistapinânihk* as a diplomatic representative for the Métis people and liaison with Louis Riel coincided with their demonstration of both European fashion, the Métis sash, and what may be early versions of the ribbon skirt.

While many friends and relatives came to join the Isbister-Bears at *kistapinânihk* prior to 1885, ᐅᐱᐅᐱᐅᐱᐅᐱ people disbursed from the Saskatchewan Valley yet again after 1885 along the traditional fur trade routes: by way of the rivers and cart trails. The series of photos taken by Commissioner N.O. Côté at the 1900 Northwest Half-Breed Scrip Commission stops at sites all along the old routes of the Green Lake Trail and North Saskatchewan riverways. Among those who dispersed included James Isbister himself, evidenced in a Côté photograph taken in Grand Rapids. Isbister continued to travel and teach school all along the Saskatchewan River trade routes he had traversed all his life, with *kistapinânihk* remaining as his home base.

While little traditional beadwork or embroidery is visible in the N.O. Côté photographs, the collection shows that men continued to wear Métis sashes, as well as moccasins, however mostly undecorated. Tartan and plaid shawls had become ubiquitous expressions for *otipemisiwak* women and girls by the 1900 Scrip Commission in northern Métis settlements, while women in French settlements closer to the 1885 battleground such as Duck Lake and Batoche often wore darker solid shades and fitted Victorian-style dresses. Some precedent for this difference in style preferences between French and English-speaking Métis had been set previously in Red River, although fluid. Even so, Hudson's Bay Post Journals and *mîkisihkahcikewin* (beadwork) held in museums demonstrate that Métis and First Nations continued to bead and wear beadwork in Prince Albert at that time. Métis artists such as Harriet Ann McKay, who beaded berries and foliage on a bright red table cloth late in her life before her death in 1913, provides an example of the type of work that was being done behind closed doors.

Beginning to trace the movements of people through *kistapinânihk* and how major events directed the flow of people and their material culture between 1862 to 1900, is a major step in identifying ancestors, beaded items, and other items of dress and culture, that lay dormant in museum collections. This work, as I have seen for myself as I complete my first pair of moccasins during this research, is also a reclamation of responsibility to our communities and families. As Racette says, it is about paying respect to Indigenous artists, families, and histories by struggling against their anonymity, investigating genealogies and specifics (*Sewing Ourselves Together* 22). And as Maria Campbell recounts:

. . . dah stories you know  
dats dah bes treasure of all to leave your family. (120)

As we gather personal identity, language, land, and family, it is the collection of Indigenous stories and Indigenous art history, that is the catalyst for healing. And as we collect these stories, more contemporary artists and designers will be mobilized to utilize the visual languages of our ancestors as a carrier and living record of knowledges that exists beyond the text.



This research lays a foundation for a wide variety of exciting future explorations. Questions and conclusions raised in this paper are the start to hopefully many future discussions with Elders and Knowledge Keepers of the North-West. There is so much more to understand, especially about the spiritual and other non-physical elements of Indigenous histories and identities here in *kistapinânihk*. Other future scholarship includes further exploration into the relationships between tartan, plaid, and Scottish ancestry in the Northwest Cree-Métis, the Jacobean wars, and the influences of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert during the late 19th and early 20th Century. Exploring how tartan may have worked as both an expression of internal national norms and external demonstration of inter-societal peoplehood, according to Andersen's dual nationhood-peoplehood matrix, would reveal much. More knowledge also needs to be gathered about the appearance of the ribbon skirt in the Saskatchewan Valley, its influences, and when and how it became imbued with ribbon skirt teachings. Beyond the 19th Century, more research also needs to be done about dynamics in *kistapinânihk* after 1900, especially how the artistic production of ᐃᑎᐅᑦᑭᑦᑭᑦ peoples of northern Saskatchewan was and remains affected by the vigorously assimilative policies of the CCF era between 1944 and 1964, which imposed the most comprehensive socialist program Canada has ever seen in the northern half of the province (Quiring xiii, xix, 40, 46). The last scholarly direction I will mention is that more work needs to be done to establish lines of continuity from gender-diverse historical Indigenous activism in *kistapinânihk* to work being done today by prominent Indigenous philosophers, creatives, and academics in the region. As contemporary Indigenous beadworkers and fashion designers gain economic and socio-political traction, scholarship that works alongside them to uncover cultural knowledge and family stories, can serve to strengthen and empower new creative works.

*I finished the vamps I started beading for my brother last year, and sewed my first moccasins for him out of them. They are moose hide with beaver trim. I don't think I have been prouder of anything I have ever made. They have saskatoons on them—a symbol to me of our childhood, picking berries with grandma, ice cream pails full of berries, eating saskatoon pies, being in the sun, smiling. I think of the saskatoon bushes I planted along a clearing to the south, by the garden. Two of them flowered this year, and little berries are beginning to form. I am thinking of ice cream pails in my future. I am thinking about our people rising up as one family.*



Fig. 19. Sorell, Lindsay. *Vamps for my brother: a saskatoon for each of us*, 2021.

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