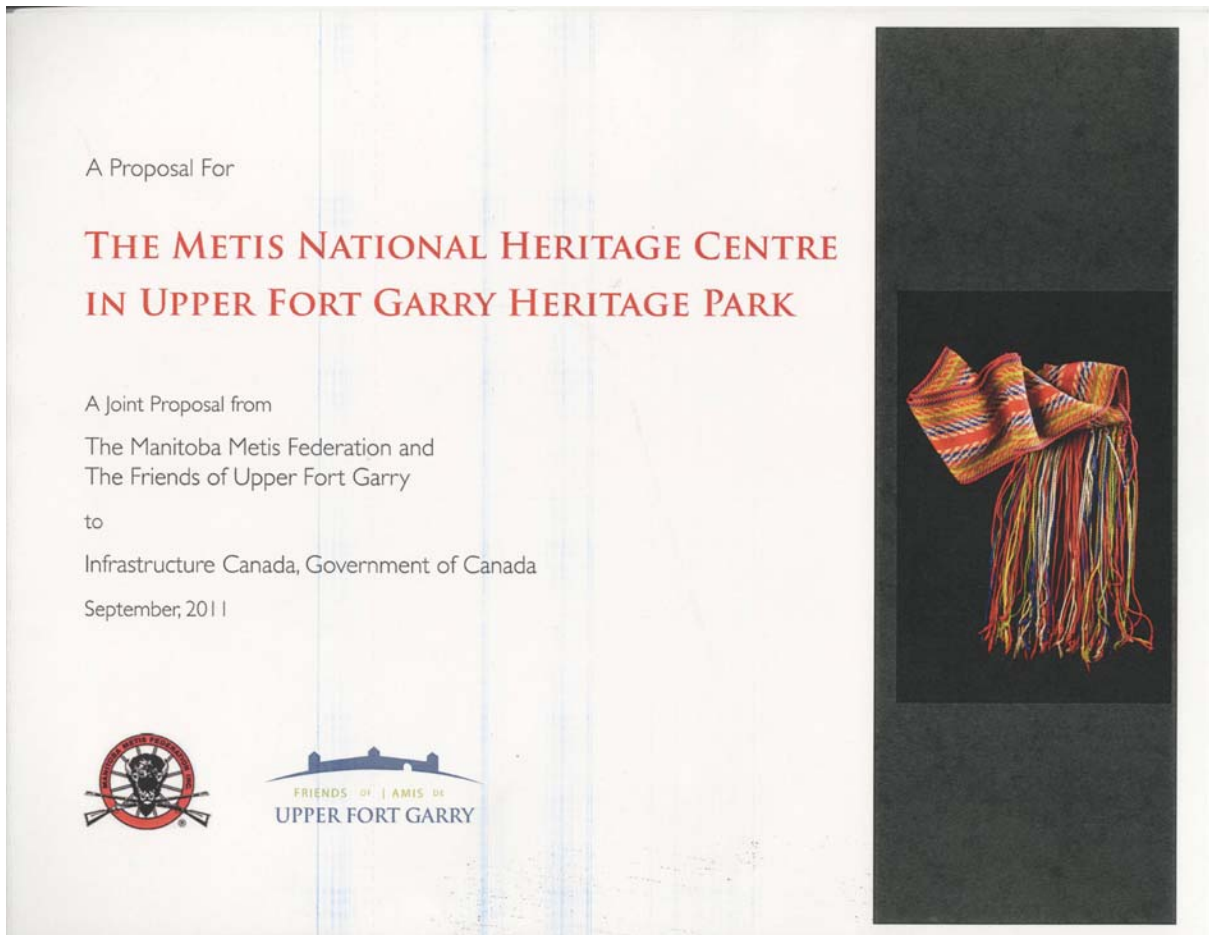


# Metis National Heritage Centre at Upper Fort Garry



The concept of a Metis National Heritage Centre has been researched and discussed for a number of years. As far back as 1994 the Metis National Council (MNC) had commissioned plans to create a National Museum of the Metis at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. At that time MNC had designated the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) as the lead MNC affiliate to take this plan forward. Due to funding constraints this plan did not go forward. Subsequently the MMF reconfigured the proposal into a plan for the development of a Metis National Heritage Centre. They tasked their affiliate the Louis Riel Institute to work on this proposal.

A 2002 study concluded that the site of Upper Fort Garry in Winnipeg was the most appropriate site for the Centre, although in 2002 land was not available for this to proceed. Now the Friends of Upper Fort Garry (FUG) have taken ownership of the site for a heritage development and the Manitoba Metis Federation has pledged financial support. The partnership between the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) and the FUG is a unique opportunity to complete the development of the site with the construction of the Upper Fort Garry Interpretive Centre which would house the National Metis Heritage Centre. There is no other Metis dedicated heritage facility in Canada. This is an opportunity to not only provide a specific facility for the presentation and interpretation

of Metis heritage, but to locate the facility on the most appropriate heritage site – the site of Upper Fort Garry.

Upper Fort Garry was the site for the deliberations of the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia, the 1870 government led by Louis Riel that brought Manitoba into Confederation.

The Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia was formed by Louis Riel's Provisional Government and arose out of the Convention of Forty. The Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia functioned between March 9, 1870 and June 24, 1870. 21 of the 28 members were Metis. On June 23, 1870, the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia met to receive the report of their delegates to Ottawa. On June 24, 1870, the Assembly, by motion of Louis Schmidt, seconded by Thomas Bunn, unanimously accepted Father Ritchot's report and approved entry into confederation via acceptance of the terms of the *Manitoba Act*.<sup>1</sup> This was the first Constitutional recognition of Metis rights. Thus, Manitoba is the only province to have been brought into Confederation by Aboriginal people.

## **Upper Fort Garry**

This was a Hudson's Bay Company trading post at the forks of the Red River and Assiniboine River in the heart of present day Winnipeg. The fort was established in 1822 near the site of the North West Company Fort Gibraltar established by John Wills<sup>2</sup> in 1810, and destroyed by the HBC on March 17, 1816 during the Pemmican Wars. Fort Garry was named after Nicholas Garry, deputy governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. It served as the administrative and military centre of fur trade within Rupert's Land.

In 1826, a severe flood destroyed the fort. It was rebuilt in 1835 by the HBC and named Upper Fort Garry to differentiate it from "the Lower Fort Garry," situated 32 km downriver; established in 1831. Throughout the mid-to-late 19th century, Upper Fort Garry played a minor role in the actual trading of furs, but was central to the administration of the HBC and the surrounding settlement. The Council of Assiniboia, an appointed administrative and judicial body of the Red River Colony run by Hudson's Bay Company officials, met at Upper Fort Garry.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Begg, *Red River Journals and Other Papers Relative to the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870*. Toronto: Champlain Society, 1956pp. 139-140.

<sup>2</sup> John Wills was married to Cuthbert Grant's sister Josephite Grant. Wills died on January 6, 1815.



Fort Garry 1875, Frank W. Lynn (University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections)

In 1869, the Hudson's Bay Company agreed to surrender its monopoly in the North-West, including Upper Fort Garry. In late 1869 and early 1870, the fort was seized by Louis Riel and the Metis during the Red River Resistance. The fort was the site of the meetings of the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia in 1870. This Assembly led by Louis Riel brought Manitoba into Confederation. Manitoba is the only province in Canada brought

into Confederation by Aboriginal people.<sup>3</sup> After the Resistance, the area around the fort continued to grow; mainly in what is now known as the Exchange District north of the present day Portage and Main intersection. This district, north of the fort, developed on the edge of what were HBC reserve lands. In 1873, the city of Winnipeg was established and the name Fort Garry was no longer used. In 1881-1884 the majority of the fort was demolished to straighten Main Street (it was at Main Street and Assiniboine Avenue).

Only the main gate (below) of the fort remains today, the area has now been designated as a Provincial Park and the “Friends of Upper Fort Garry” are raising funds to rebuild aspects of this historic site. The area of Winnipeg running along the Red River south of the original fort is called Fort Garry. The hotel beside the fort is called the Fort Garry Hotel. It was originally constructed for the Grand Trunk and Pacific Railway company. The two streets on either side of the hotel are Fort Street and Garry Street.



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

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<sup>3</sup> The Assembly’s elected representatives were 82% Metis and the population of Manitoba at the time was 85% Metis.