

Becoming Who We Are in Canada

reserve land set aside for the occupation and use of First Nations in exchange for giving up claim to their traditional territories; title to the land remains with the federal government

Aboriginal peoples the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America; this is a broad term that includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada

More About

The Word for Buffalo

The bison was a food source for First Nations peoples. Every part of the bison was used for food or to make clothing and shelters. When the first Europeans arrived, they called the bison "buffalo" after water buffalo they had seen in Africa. The word "buffalo" was then introduced to First Nations peoples. Although "bison" is scientifically correct, First Nations peoples still use the word "buffalo." This word has taken on a special meaning. First Nations peoples believe that this animal, which has a spirit, willingly gave its life to feed, clothe, and shelter them. Elders fear that if the term "bison" is used instead, this will change the significance of many ceremonies, and it might confuse younger generations of First Nations children.



▲ The Corbett family arrives in Saskatchewan in 1911 from Surrey, England.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the social structures, roles, and responsibilities of the people living in Canada were quite different from what they are today.

The building of the railway across the West drastically changed the ways of life of Plains First Nations and Métis. Bison herds were almost completely destroyed, leaving First Nations and Métis without a major source of food, hides, and trade goods. Traditional lifestyles were being destroyed. One reason that most First Nations signed treaties and moved to **reserves** was to receive supplies and help from the government. Families were broken up when First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were forced to go to residential schools. These schools were created by the government to force European values and beliefs onto **Aboriginal peoples**.

Many European colonists came to Canada with few belongings or little money. Large families were common, and children living on farms helped with clearing the land, planting crops, and caring for the animals. Children also worked in factories or mines to help earn money for their family. Women, minority groups, and Aboriginal peoples could not legally vote or own property.

Despite bright hopes, the new nations soon ran into problems. Groups within countries fought over land and resources. Governments banned opposition parties. Military dictators, rulers with total power backed by the army, often led these governments.

European Colonization in Canada

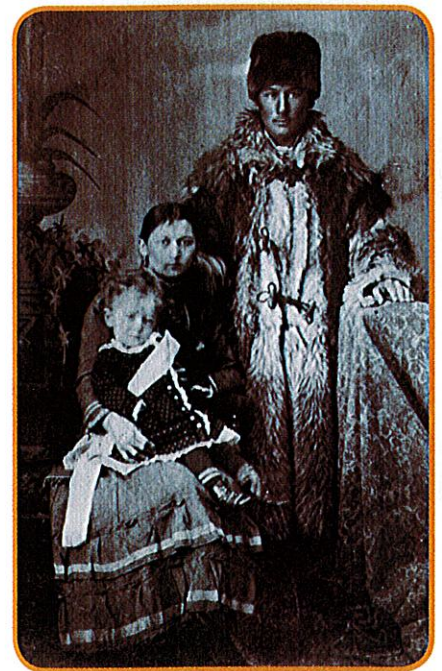
Canada officially became a country at the time of Confederation, in 1867. Prior to that time, several colonies made up what was known as British North America. The northwest was made up of Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory.

Aboriginal peoples lived throughout British North America. First Nations and Inuit were the first to live on the land we now call Canada. They had worked closely with newcomers during the fur trade. The Métis, who were the children of European fur traders and First Nations women, emerged as a distinct nation. Early settlers had depended on the skills of First Nations peoples to survive, but once colonies formed and colonial governments took control, they were no longer seen as allies.

Confederation

During the process of Confederation, no Aboriginal peoples were invited to any meetings or conferences. Aboriginal beliefs and values about the land they depended on for survival were not considered important at that time. As well, the politicians discussing Confederation did not consider Aboriginal peoples as citizens of the new country of Canada. Here are some of the ways that Confederation affected Aboriginal peoples in Canada:

- After Confederation, the new government set out to **assimilate** Aboriginal peoples through cultural change.
- The Department of Indian Affairs was created to decide how First Nations should live. First Nations peoples were ordered to live on reserves, where their lives were controlled by Indian Agents.
- No treaties were signed between the government and the Métis. Métis people lost their lands, and the government felt no responsibility for their welfare. As a result, many settled on small portions of land along roads, and became known as the “road allowance people.”
- The Inuit were isolated and for the most part ignored by the new Canadian government. The government did not take an active interest in the North until the 1940s.



▲ A Métis family in the 1880s

assimilation the process by which a group is absorbed into a larger group by taking on the characteristics of the dominant culture