



SELF-GUIDED TOURS:

## First Nations & Métis



Cunnewabum - Métis Girl, Fort Edmonton  
Painter - Paul Kane 1846

**How to use this guide:** This guide offers some tidbits of information about the history and experience of Edmonton's indigenous peoples as a starting point for you to learn at your own pace. It also provides suggestions of buildings to visit and questions to ask costumed staff.

*Fort Edmonton Park is located in Treaty 6 territory, as well as the traditional lands of the Métis people.*

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### Time Immemorial

Though the traces of its ancient peoples are less obvious, the area we now call Edmonton has attracted human activity since before Stonehenge. A variety of First Nations peoples have favoured this bend in the river as a trading, camping, and meeting place for more than 500 generations, and continue to live in and around the city today.

**Edmonton's First Inhabitants:** First Nations traditions hold that they have always been here. Archaeological evidence indicates that ancient peoples arrived in what we now call Alberta **at least** eleven thousand years ago. A pottery fragment from the Strathcona Science Park in Edmonton's east end is believed to have been left here by ancestors of the *Nitsitapi* (Blackfoot Confederacy).

**Edmonton as a Seasonal Campsite:** Edmonton must have been appealing because of the fish-filled rivers and lakes, as well as its location on a traditional north-south travel route often called the 'Wolf's Track.' What else makes this an attractive place to



live?

**ASK AN INTERPRETER** at the Cree Encampment (#18) about the pre-contact existence of the *Nehiyawak* (Cree), and how they might say 'hello', 'thank you' or any other words.

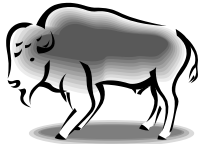
**BE SURE TO VISIT** the map at the York Boat Display (#19) and picture the landscape without political boundaries. What do you know about the traditional territories of first peoples?

### 1846 Fort - Relationships

By 1846, Europeans had established a presence within existing indigenous trade networks. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) depended on First Nations traders as its source for profitable furs and essential food supplies, which were obtained by bartering for European goods. Each side offered something of value to the other; the trade was a meeting of equals.

**Meeting Place of Many Nations:** Edmonton thrived as a trading post partly due to its key location between prairie and parkland, and many different peoples. North of Edmonton lived the Company's close trading partners, the Woods Cree and Strongwood Nakoda. South of Edmonton lived the Plains Cree, Plains Nakoda (Assiniboine or Stoney), and the powerful Blackfoot Confederacy.

Considering the long distances they covered following bison herds, what European goods do you think would be most desirable?



**The Métis:** By 1846, most of the post's men and all of the women and children were Métis (*may-TEE*). The Métis people are not just a mixture of First Nations and European. They have their own culture and traditions. What kind of role do you think Métis women played in the trading post's operation?

**ASK AN INTERPRETER** at the Trade Store (#3) about trade ceremonies and preferred goods. Ask a female interpreter why she lives in the Fort or what the men's sashes signify. Ask an interpreter in Rowand House if they can tell you about smallpox.

**BE SURE TO VISIT** the Cree Encampment (#18) to see how first peoples adapted European technology to their lifestyle, and Men's Quarters (#13) to see how Métis country wives lived.

## 1885 Street - Changes

By 1885 the Canadian government claimed governorship over the “Northwest” and signed treaties with First Nations who lived there. Edmonton, in Treaty 6 territory, became a struggling settlement composed of newly arriving pioneer farmers and Métis locals.

**Northwest Resistance:** In 1885 the Métis of Batoche, as well as some Cree bands, forcibly protested the Canadian government’s failure to address their concerns. They faced dwindling bison herds and new settlers laying claim to traditional lands. While there were a series of battles in what is now Saskatchewan, the Resistance produced more fears and rumours than it did deaths. How do you think these events affected Cree and Métis in Edmonton?

**Scrip and Land Seizure:** Before and after the events of 1885, the government searched for ways to manage the west and its diverse first peoples. The Indian Department’s favoured solutions were reserves and “scrip,” a one-time land grant given to Métis family heads and their children. In 1888, with most treaty promises broken, the Papaschase band in Edmonton was the first in Canada to surrender its full reserve despite signing a treaty. Why do you think reserve land was seized?



**ASK AN INTERPRETER** about the Edmonton experience in the Northwest Resistance. Also ask a Métis interpreter what policies of scrip meant for them and their families?

**BE SURE TO VISIT** the [Land Office](#) (#45) to learn more about Métis Scrip and reserve lands. Visit the [Peter Erasmus House](#) (#40), [Kenneth McDonald House](#) (#44), and [Métis Camp](#) (#47) to see how local Métis families lived.

## 1905 Street - Challenges

After the arrival of the railway in 1891, Edmonton’s immigrant population exploded, swiftly outnumbering the Cree and Métis. Seizure of First Nations reserve lands continued as the city expanded while Métis people found themselves deprived of their Indigenous rights.

**Local Champion:** During the 1880s and 90s, Edmonton and other western communities hosted foot-races upon which great sums of money would be bet, and at which indigenous athletes like Moosewa and Alex Decoteau often dominated. While serving as the first indigenous police officer in Canada, Decoteau also competed in the 1912 Summer Olympics. He was killed in the Second Battle of Passchendaele in 1917. What roles do you think urban First Nations peoples played in the development of Edmonton society?



**Residential Schools:** In its belief that assimilating indigenous peoples into white society was a justifiable goal, the Canadian government introduced residential schools. Students were generally forbidden to speak their indigenous languages or practice their cultural or religious ceremonies. There were numerous instances of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. The lasting effects of residential schools are still being felt in First Nations communities across the country. In spite of these effects, how do you think communities have maintained their traditions and languages? What role can you play in reconciliation?

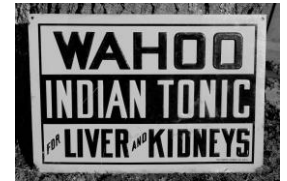
**ASK AN INTERPRETER** if they know any other interesting facts or stories about Alex Decoteau.

**BE SURE TO VISIT** [St. Anthony’s School](#) (#58) to learn more about education in this era. Visit the [Fire Hall](#) (#63) to see if Decoteau is on duty.

## 1920 Street - Unity

At the close of the First World War, Edmonton experienced economic depression and national conflicts arose over labour issues, women’s rights, and indigenous rights.

**Marketing the ‘Indian’:** During the 1920s, stereotypical images of indigenous people were used for marketing and sales. Sometimes these images were used as generic symbols for Canada, while for other products the ‘Indian’ was associated with “the great outdoors”, strength and courage, or the innocence of nature. You can see these kinds of commercial appropriations in stores such as Sun Drugs. Can you think of other examples of marketers appropriating the imagery of the ‘Indian’? Are we still using indigenous imagery as a marketing tool today?



**The League of Indians:** Upon his return from fighting in the Great War, Lt. Fred Loft, a member of the Six Nations Reserve, created the League of Indians of Canada in 1919 to resolve grievances common to First Nations across the country. The movement spread to Alberta in 1922 with a grand council at Hobbema (now Maskwacis). The League was replaced by other organizations later on. Do you see evidence of other groups seeking unity and rights on 1920 Street? What pan-indigenous groups exist today?

**ASK AN INTERPRETER** about how the eugenics movement affected First Nations peoples in Alberta. Ask about early Metis activism and national leaders.

**BE SURE TO VISIT** [Sun Drugs](#) (#73) to see if you can find any stereotypical depictions of the ‘Indian.’ Ask at the [AGT Building](#) (#79) about the Métis history of St. Paul, Alberta.

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