

Stories of Resilience-The Metis Road Allowance People



- **What is a Road Allowance Community?**

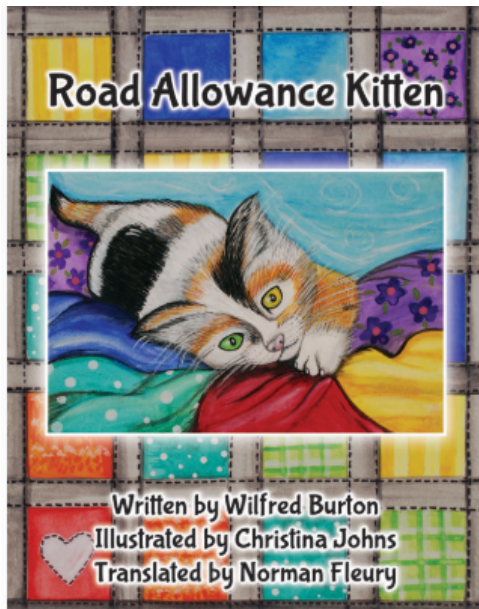
Road Allowance communities are a key but little known element of Métis history and identity. John A. Macdonald was set on building the country and clearing Indigenous title to land was an important part of that process. As a means of extinguishing Métis title to land, the scrip policy was implemented. Scrip was designed to extinguish Métis title to land, in much the same way as treaties for the First Nations. Scrip was kind of like a coupon. In exchange for their rights to the land Métis people were offered a coupon (Scrip) for money or a homestead. Scrip commissioners travelled to Métis communities where Métis gathered to fill out applications for their entitlement. However, settlement of the Canadian west was often lawless, and the scrip process quickly became corrupt. Many Métis were impersonated or tricked out of their land & scrip. Quickly the Métis people became marginalized as they were not considered Indigenous and could not pay taxes on land in the new Dominion of Canada. As a result, some Métis communities were established on small spaces of land left between roads and railways. These road allowances were crown lands so the Métis were considered illegal tenants on the land could and as a result, these Métis communities were often very poor.

- **Where Were the Communities Located?**

Road Allowance Communities sprang up throughout the prairies such as Saskatchewan's Spring Valley along the fringes of Prince Albert National Park, Chicago Line or "Little Chicago" in the Qu'Appelle Valley, and Manitoba's Ste. Madeleine and Rooster Town (Winnipeg). Road allowance houses reflected the Métis' extreme poverty — houses were usually uninsulated, roofed with tarpaper and built from discarded lumber or logs and various "recycled" materials. These small one- or two-room dwellings housed entire families.

- **How did the Road Allowance Communities inspire resiliency?**

"Despite being poor and facing racism on a daily basis, many Métis Elders remember the good parts of life on the road allowance positively. People danced to lively fiddle music at house parties. They visited while picking berries and digging seneca root. They told wonderful stories, and they enthusiastically celebrated "li Zhoor di Laan" (New Year's). Michif was spoken among community members, and the Elders provided a traditional education to the children. The Métis were independent and provided for their families the best they could. Community members helped one another, and families were close-knit. Even though life was difficult on the road allowance, many Métis Elders look back fondly to a time when life was simpler, and people looked out for one another. Even though they were poor, they were rich in so many other ways." (Indigenous People's Atlas)



They say, “Home is where the heart is.” For Rosie and Madeline, home also included their pet kitten. Imagine being told you have to leave your home ... without your pet. Based on a true story, Road Allowance Kitten gives readers a glimpse into the history of the Road Allowance Métis and their forced removal from their humble, but beloved, homes on the road allowance. Award-winning children’s author Wilfred Burton skillfully shares this story through the eyes of the children involved. The vibrant illustrations by Christina Johns are the perfect accompaniment to this authentic vignette of a little-known part of Prairie history.

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Illustrator: Christina Johns

Translator: Norman Fleury

Grade Level: Primary

- Activities for your classroom:

- Try a hoola-hoop challenge:

One of the factors that made life on the Road Allowance bearable was the people’s ability to work together. Have the kids form a circle while holding hands, but before the last pair connect, place a hula-hoop over one arm. Without letting each other’s hands go, the challenge is to get the hula-hoop to move across the circle. Kids will have to work together to move the hoop and support each other so they don’t fall over. Once the hoop has moved around the circle talk about:

- What made it difficult?

- What skills did students have to use to get the hoop moving?

- How did the students work together to get the hoop moving?

- Try playing the game Canny Can. What other games can you make up using what you have around you?

- Write an acrostic poem using the word HOME

- Find out where the Road Allowance communities were and plot them out on a map.

- Do a partner walk and talk and talk about the story.

- How would you feel about living with less?

- Do you think the Métis people were treated fairly?

- What kinds of things do you do with your family to make memories together?