



Suggested Reading

Callihoo, Victoria
1953 Early Life in Lac Ste. Anne and St. Albert in the Eighteen Seventies. *The Alberta Historical Review* 1(3):21-26.

Payment, Diane
1990 *"The Free People – Otipemisiwak"*, Batoche, Saskatchewan 1870-1930. Environment Canada, Ottawa.

Photos courtesy of Dr. M. Kennedy, K.D. Weinbender, Provincial Archives of Manitoba and the Glenbow Archives (Glenbow-Alberta Institute).

Cover Photo: A Métis *hivernant* home from 1874, photographed in Wood Mountain Saskatchewan.

Side photo: An aerial view of modern-day Petite Ville.

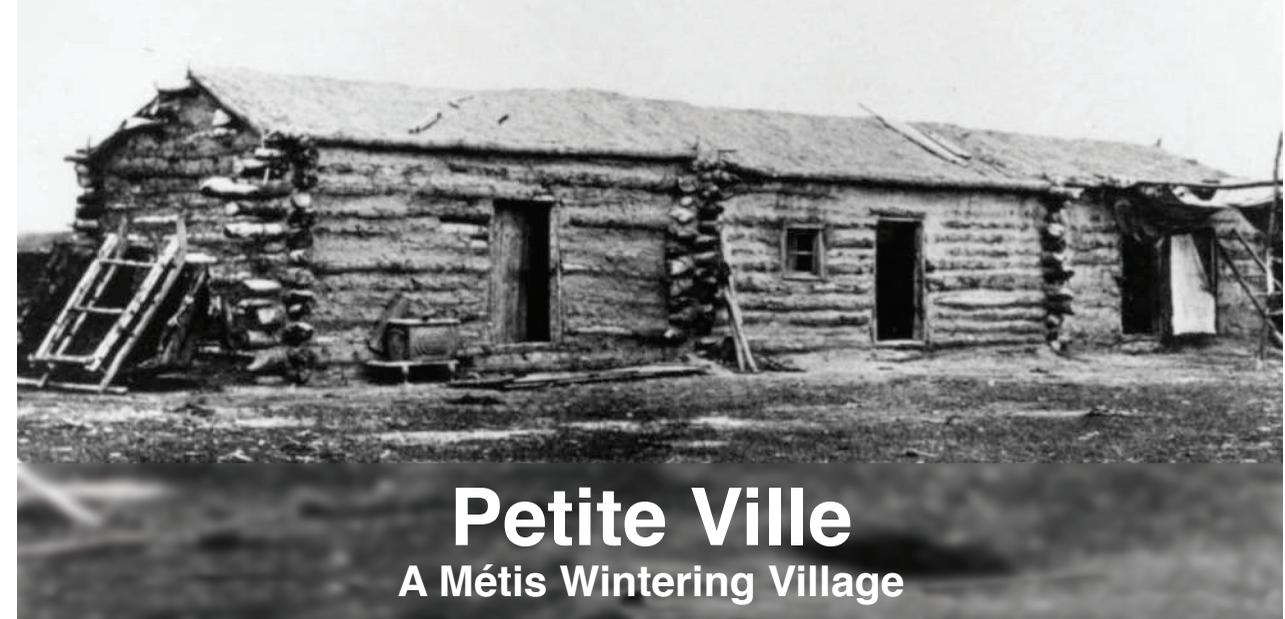
For more information, please contact:

Heritage Resources Branch
Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport
9th Floor, 1919 Saskatchewan Drive
Regina SK S4P 4H2
Phone: (306) 787-2817
E-mail: arms@gov.sk.ca



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Petite Ville A Métis Wintering Village

In the 1860s, many Métis moved into the South Saskatchewan River region to hunt the few remaining bison herds. Small “wintering over” or *hivernant* villages were built in sheltered, wooded areas, to escape the harsh weather. With the return of spring, villages were deserted as the Métis left to hunt bison herds on the plains.

Petite Ville was established in 1870, when 40 Métis families decided to winter together at a bend in the South Saskatchewan River. A permanent Oblate mission was quickly established there at the request of the Métis, who built a church and home for the priests. In 1871, 65 men, 58 women and 199 children were living at Petite Ville, many of whom belonged to the Dumont, Paranteau, Batoche, Emlin, Gardupius, Moreau and Racette families.

An 1872 visitor recalled a village of “forty to fifty rough hewn, flat-roofed cabins” which made “warm, comfortable abodes”. The flat, wooden pole roofs were covered with sod and hay while bison parchment on windows and doors kept out the wind but let in light. Extended families usually lived together, sharing the single room that was kept warm by a huge chimney and, occasionally, an iron stove.

Because of the dwindling number of bison herds, the Métis experienced several years of near famine. By 1875, Petite Ville was probably abandoned as the Métis established farms in the new agricultural settlement of St. Laurent, which is now known as Batoche.

Today, all that remains of the once vibrant village are mounds and depressions. But archaeologists have found more remnants of the *hivernant* way of life beneath the surface.



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Wall and Floorboards



Floorboards were supported by beams running beside the foundation logs. Wood found during excavation (mostly aspen and poplar) was very decayed and fragmented. For the size of the building, very few structural remains were found, suggesting the building was not left to collapse after it was abandoned.

Instead, as they started their new homesteads, the Métis likely re-used much of the wood from Petite Ville, probably as firewood.

Chimneys (A10 and A6)



Chimneys or “mud stoves” were made by plastering wooden poles with a mixture of clay and hay. The opening was large, sometimes as much as four feet high, allowing firewood logs to be leaned upright.



Cellars/Storage Pits (A5, A7, A9, A13 and A14)



Lined with wood and covered by floorboards or a door, these depressions added storage space to the cabin's interior. The holes also acted as ‘traps’ catching many small objects that fell to the floor. About 28% of all the artifacts found by the excavations were located in A9 or A5.

Mudding Pits (A1, A2, A3, A4, A11 and A15)

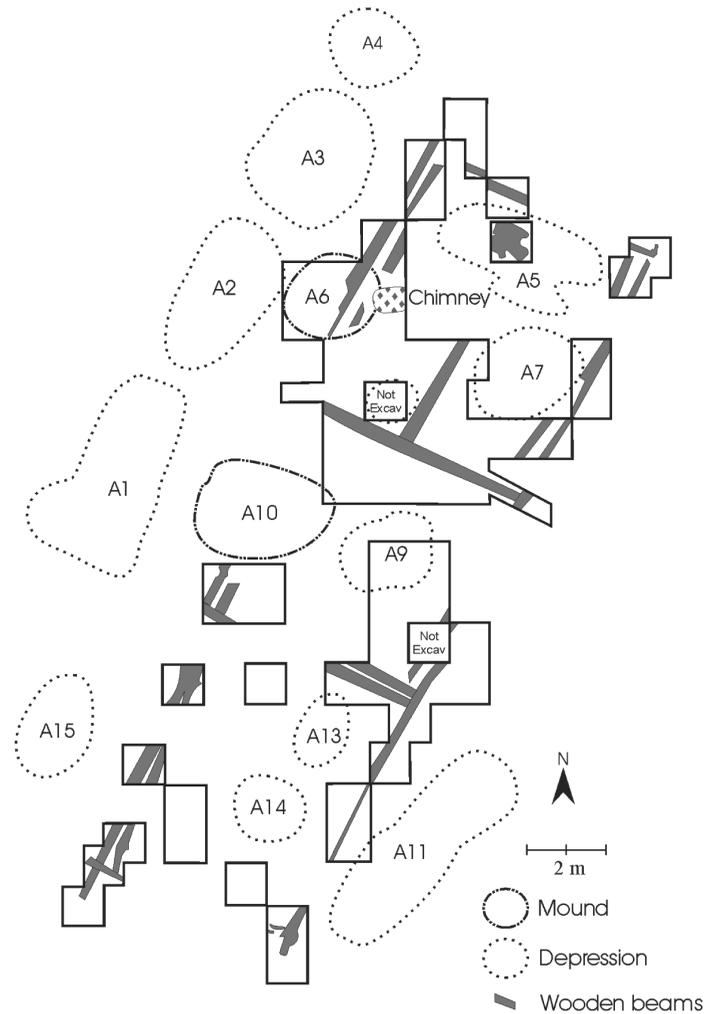
A lot of clay was needed in the construction and maintenance of a log cabin. Besides a “mud stove”, the gaps between the logs would be filled with a grass and clay mixture, which commonly needed repairs. The Métis found the necessary clay needed for repairs by digging large “mudding pits”. Archaeologists do not think these pits were used as cellars or storage because of their size and because very few artifacts were found in them.

Archaeological Excavations at Petite Ville

The mounds and depressions created by the Métis in the 1870s are still visible on the surface today. Many of them are quite large, more than several meters in size. One cluster of these features has been excavated, a map of which is seen below.

To date, the building that was uncovered is the largest example of a Métis *hivernant* home ever excavated. At 21 meters long and 7 meters wide (60 x 21 feet), its size rivals some modern homes! The length of the house suggests that internal walls would have been needed to support the roof. The wooden beams that were found indicate that there were probably three rooms in this “long house”. Several families, likely related, would have shared this large “long house”, which probably looked very similar to the Métis home in Wood Mountain seen on the cover.

What these families left behind provides us with insights into the lives of Métis bison hunters 130 years ago.



Artifacts



Some small objects, like lead shot (used for hunting), were found throughout the house. Others were found concentrated in one area. For example, straight pins and needles were found mainly around the chimney A6. Many of the straight pins were broken or bent and it is believed they were being used for jewelry making, rather than for sewing.

Glass Beads



Thousands of glass beads were found at Petite Ville, accounting for almost 70% of all the artifacts found. Most were tiny seed beads (smaller than 2 mm) but many different shapes and colors were found. Given the long tradition of Métis beadwork, particularly the intricate flower patterns, the only surprise is that more beads were not found!

Tea Cups



Sharing a cup of tea with guests was an important aspect of Métis life. A reflection of Métis hospitality can be seen in the thirteen different ceramic patterns found. Most of the blue and white ceramics were purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company and were made by Spode and Copeland in England.

Rosary



A rosary with a miraculous medal reflects the strong religious beliefs of the *hivernant* Métis and the value they placed on having a priest in their community.