



We are Louis Riel's people, the founders of the province of Manitoba. Not since 1870 have we taken more steps on the pathway toward taking our rightful place in Canada's confederation than we do today. As the 2021 federal election campaign continues, it's more important than ever that we, the Red River Métis, make sure our voices are heard, and that our votes are counted. We must protect the gains we've made in recent years and prevent anyone else from taking what we have earned.

One of the ways your Métis Government is communicating your needs and interests, and the needs and interests of your family, is through the creation of a document called *The top 15 priorities for the Red River Métis*. This document is on our website and has been shared with the New Democratic Party of Canada, the Liberal Party of Canada, the Conservative Party of Canada, the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party of Canada. We asked each to consider building our priorities into their national platforms to help address Canada's "unfinished business of reconciliation" with our Nation.

These priorities were identified based on feedback from Citizens through surveys, along with consultation with Citizens who reached out to our departments with concerns, and the collective experiences of your elected representatives on Cabinet, including me.

Our priorities

Protection of our identity – You have told your Métis Government that your highest priority is the protection of the existing definition of Métis identity, and the prevention of any appropriation – cultural or otherwise – of the term by others who are not part of our Nation.

Recognition of our treaty rights – The agreement signed on July 6 between Canada and the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) commits the federal government to creating a constitutionally protected modern-day treaty, giving us a foundation for further negotiations around taxation, law enforcement and fiscal arrangements, with more to come.

Land claims – We know the 2013 *MMF v. Canada* declaration said that the solemn constitutional promise in section 31 of the *Manitoba Act* was not kept. The 1.4 million acres promised to Métis children as a head start were not delivered. The ensuing scrip program was a failure, rife with negligence and fraud. Our July 2021 agreement reinforces Canada's commitment to negotiating toward a resolution. I committed to resolving this at the beginning of my time as your leader, and I will not rest until this is complete.

Proportionate and fair funding – As constitutionally protected rightsholders, we know that Canada is obligated to support a distinctions-based approach for funding Red River Métis governance, programs, and services. This is not a request for a handout, but an expectation that a recognized government should be able to determine how Citizen tax dollars are spent. This funding must be clearly, proportionately, and equitably distributed between the Indigenous communities in Canada.

Métis-specific healthcare – The need for a Métis-specific healthcare strategy has never been clearer than it has been through the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw our ability to access appropriate support for Citizens become subject to the political whims of the provincial government. Therefore, we seek full inclusion in the First Nation Inuit Health Branch (FNIB) and empowerment to deliver healthcare services to Citizens, including nursing stations, laboratories, homecare, hospital funding, long-term care, and data-sharing so we can properly deliver on population health surveillance, infectious disease management, and immunization record keeping.

Métis child and family services – We have argued with provincial authorities that our children have become an industry, and that their continued focus on apprehension does not create a good environment for families or kids in care. We intend to fully implement the provisions of Bill C-92, but we need to secure adequate funding and full cooperation from all partners.

Education and employment – The number of Métis Citizens entering post-secondary education continues to grow, but we know more can be done to support our students. That's why we are seeking enhanced funding for post-secondary education

for Métis students, with an emphasis on those in remote and rural areas, and initiatives for graduates transitioning into the workforce through internships and federally supported hiring programs to combat systemic racism.

Funding for microbusinesses – One of the trends that has emerged with the pandemic is the growth of microbusinesses. From beadwork to clothing design, leatherwork, and jewelry design, we see this as a growing space that suits the entrepreneurial spirit of the Red River Métis. Between supports for these new start-ups and the traditional small- and medium-sized businesses that form the backbone of our country and our Nation, we will continue to advance your interests and ensure you have the right tools to succeed.

Distinction-based set-aside program – Allowing all Citizens to have meaningful participation in our economy is vital to the well-being of our communities and our families. That is why we are asking for revisions to the federal set aside program and procurement process, so that we have access to a proportionate share of contracts with Canada and allow time for individuals to gain the needed skills to successfully compete for contracts in our communities.

Competing in the global economy – Access to effective, efficient, and affordable broadband is key to competing in the global economy. While there are initiatives to create better access for rural and remote communities, many Red River Métis villages have not been included in current plans. We will work to end this disparity and ensure that our entrepreneurs, students, and Citizens are on equal footing when it comes to accessing everything the World Wide Web has to offer.

International trade – Part of our nation-to-nation, government-to-government standing is the ability to look beyond the boundaries of our Homeland and our country, to forge new relationships with other Indigenous governments and communities across the globe. These relationships and trade arrangements allow for economic prosperity to be in the hands of all Indigenous peoples of the world and must be supported by any party who wishes to lead our country.

How we'll share the information with you

The perspectives and responses we get from the parties vying for leadership of our country will be shared with our Métis Citizens and voters in Manitoba and beyond, to help you and your family members understand which parties are able to commit to advancing reconciliation with our Nation

and to make sure you have the information you need to make an informed voting decision. I encourage all Red River Métis Citizens to look for these important priorities when speaking with or listening to all candidates, so that you know where they stand on prioritizing your needs and the needs of your family. And above all else, make sure that your eligible family, friends, and community

members are able to get to the polls and vote in this critical election. Our ability to negotiate for these priorities will be significantly impacted by the philosophy of the party that takes power.

While your Métis Government continues to work on these long-term supports for our Nation, I encourage everyone to stay safe and follow the

public health guidelines. I offer my prayers to all our Citizens, friends, and neighbours, and my deepest condolences to those who have been caused to grieve.

Meeqwetch,

President David Chartrand. LL.D. hon. D.M. ∞

Sierra Hill's Speech at the Rooster Town Picnic "Remembering the Residents"



L to R: Sierra Hill giving a speech; Sierra's Grand Mother Laureen Hill (nee Laramée); and her brother Walter Laramée, MMF President David Chartrand giving speech at Rooster Town Picnic.

The following is a speech given by Sierra Hill at the Rooster Town Picnic "Remembering the Residents" on Sunday August 29, 2021. This event was held to gather descendants of Rooster Town and honour the residents that lived there.

Hello everyone,

What a beautiful Sunday it is! I am happy to be joining you on Treaty One territory and in the Heart of the Homeland of the Red River Métis Nation. Before introducing myself, I would like to thank everyone for attending and hearing the stories of the community of Rooster Town. I appreciate all the Elders and distinguished guests for taking the time to come today. Thank you to the sponsors for putting on this wonderful opportunity to gather and, of course, an opportunity to meet new family members. Actually, when I first messaged Darrell Sais about this event, he informed me that we were, in fact, related, and I have a feeling that more conversations like that will unfold the rest of today! We have some amazing performers and activities here as well, and we are set for a day filled with fun!

Now to introduce myself, my name is Sierra Hill. My maternal grandfather Jerry was from Winnipeg, and my maternal Grandmother Bea immigrated to Canada when she was six months old from England. My paternal grandfather, Robert, was born in Alberta, and my paternal Grandmother Laureen was Métis and grew up in the wonderful community we are celebrating today. Her family was made up of the Laramées and the Parisiens.

This year will be my last year of my undergraduate degree at the University of Winnipeg. I am studying honours history with a double major in Sociology. My studies focus on Métis history and museum studies. It is actually quite ironic because the University, which is founded on a colonial-based institution, has been the starting place for me to reconnect with my Métis heritage. Luckily the University has incorporated much more space for Indigenous knowledge, and this was done from the work of Indigenous knowledge keepers, Elders, and advocates. It is through my studies that I was able to learn more about Rooster Town and the unfair and discriminatory circumstances that the residents, including my Grandmother, faced.

Today, I want to touch on this history of discrimination, and then I want to flip the script and talk about my mission as I navigate through reconnecting with my heritage and as I go forward in my career as a historian. A lot of the information I will discuss comes from work by other academics and scholars who have conducted research on Métis history that I have studied through my academic career. Some of the topics in the next paragraph may be triggering as it touches on the racism that the residents faced.

As I stated above, the last few years, I have been focused on reconnecting alongside my dad Bruce, with our Métis heritage. I was raised in a very Canadian-Westernized culture and education-based system. My parents, Bruce and Sherri, always raised my sister Kirsten and I with the knowledge that we are Métis, and it was never hidden, but I didn't carry much pride towards it. Growing up, my dad didn't feel a ton of pride towards his Métis identity either. To have pride, and knowledge of the culture is essential. The colonial agenda wanted generations of Indigenous people to feel shame from identity. It is why my dad faced shame, and why I felt shame. This shame in my family began from the discrimination that my grandma and her family and neighbours faced living in Rooster Town.

It was a common idea that Indigenous people were not fit for urban living. Initially, people thought that the creation of these fringe towns was proof that Métis people were unfit for the growing urban society. Scholars now realize after studying the characteristics of Rooster Town, it was not evidence of Métis people's failure to survive urban living but a survival strategy.

Rooster Town, like many other road allowance communities, was faced with extreme poverty. The residents of Rooster Town would have to walk in order to get water, and food was also very scarce. The residents pressured the City of Winnipeg for plumbing and running water but was denied because the City hoped that without access to this, it would lead to the dispersal of the residents. It was also the aim of the City to create a hurtful racist narrative about the residents of Rooster Town through the use of the Media. During the 1950s, the media would partake in investigative activities that would aim to

expose the unthinkable living situations of the Métis people living in these communities. The newspapers would knock on the doors of the residents of Rooster Town and take pictures of the houses and the living situations. The goal of the media was to portray the stereotype that Métis people were unfit for suburban living. The media embarrassed the residents of Rooster Town and ignored the reasons as to why Rooster Town and other Métis communities were created. You can see an example of this scrutiny in an article from the *Winnipeg Free Press* in 1951 where school trustee Mrs. Nan Murphy said, “They have no plumbing, no sewers, and they’re crowded into those little shacks and sleeping in some cases four to a bed.” When discussing the children of Rooster Town, the article states that the parents of children in the developed suburbs would not let their children play with the “Rooster Town pupils for fear of infection.” The *Free Press* discussed how the town had not drawn a lot of public attention until the city housing began to creep closer, and that is when the City said it was becoming a “serious social problem.” Mrs. Murphy recommended that the only solution was “to condemn the area and move the people out.”

After experiencing racism, and impoverished situations on the basis of identity, it was no surprise, my Grandmother didn’t ecstatically proclaim her

background. My Grandmother and her siblings, like other Indigenous people at the time, would claim that they were a part of other ethnicities that had similar skin tones as those ethnicities were not treated as poorly. This is because of the public perception that Métis people and Indigenous people were sub-humans and not made to be a part of Western Civilization.

In 1959, the residents were forced out with the mission of the dissemination of the people, community and the Métis culture and pride. As we stand here today, we can strongly declare that their mission was a failure. Historic narratives often focus on the trials and tribulations that Indigenous people faced. While it is important to focus on these hardships, I like to focus on the importance of the resiliency and positive aspects of the community. Family and community were at the centre of Rooster Town. The love for their family and community was what pushed them to remain strong in the face of adversity. It was what enabled them to push through and create large successful families, with the descendants that are gathering here today that are filled with pride of their Métis heritage. There have been many events and situations where Métis pride and culture have tried to be crushed. But look where we are today, we have Mayor Brian Bowman who is

Métis, we have President Chartrand and his Cabinet who has fought for Métis self-governing rights, and won the landmark victory wherein 2013 the Supreme Court of Canada declared that the Crown had not fulfilled its constitutional obligation of fulfilling the land grant provision as stated in sections 31 and 32 of the *Manitoba Act* in 1870.

As we stand here today, we honour those residents of Rooster Town who showed resiliency in the face of adversity. We must continue to honour them and share their legacy and their memory for generations to come. That is why I asked to speak today, was to ensure that my Grandmother Laureen’s legacy was being shared. On March 30th of this year, my grandma Laureen passed away. She was the last of her siblings and the last of the members of our family that lived in Rooster Town. It has been so hard without her, and I miss her every single day, but I am so happy that I get opportunities like this today to share my grandma’s story and get to celebrate her strength. I hope that we continue honouring those that came before us and that we continue celebrating our culture and create a sense of pride for future generations. Thank you so much for allowing me to share my story, and I hope you all have a wonderful day!

WAG kickoff to Heartbeat of a Nation celebrates Métis women



Métis fiddlers Morgan Grace, Melissa St. Goddard, and Tayler Fleming provided entertainment for the exhibit’s kickoff.

The Winnipeg Art Gallery’s (WAG) Eckhardt-Gramatté Hall was alive with the sound of fiddle music on August 20 to celebrate the opening of Métis artist Tracy Charette Fehr’s exhibit – *Heartbeat of a Nation: Métis Women 250 Years*. Métis fiddlers Morgan Grace, Melissa St. Goddard, and Tayler Fleming provided entertainment for the evening’s 150 guests.

Sponsored by the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) and its affiliate, the Infinity Women Secretariat (IWS), the event was hosted by mother-daughter duo Holly and Brandi Vezina, with Elder Marcella Vezina providing a prayer. Greetings were presented by Minister Andrew Carrier, Winnipeg Metis Association Vice-President; Alyssa Thomas, IWS Youth Board Representative; Julia Lafreniere, WAG Head of

Indigenous Initiatives and co-curator of the exhibit; and Tracy Charette Fehr (IWS member).

“We know that traditionally, women played a critical role in developing and sustaining our Nation, raising our children, and teaching them our ways – truly the knowledge keepers of our community – and are actively participating in the economic activities of the family as well as our community. Today, Métis women are crucial to the well-being of our families, our communities, and our Nation, and that has been true throughout our history,” said Minister Carrier, adding that he is honoured to be surrounded by such extraordinary Métis women.

“We know that your community stands behind you and recognizes that you have always been and will remain the heartbeat of our Nation.”

Remarking on another success and partnership for the Métis Nation, Alyssa Thomas said that IWS looks forward to continuing its partnership with the WAG. “Tracy’s exhibit is truly one of a kind, and we are honoured to support her work and dedication to Métis women.”

In *Heartbeat of a Nation* – co-curated by IWS member Julia Lafreniere and Riva Symko, WAG Head of Collections & Exhibitions – Fehr marks 250 years by tracing the history of seven generations of Métis grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, and cousins of her own mother, Beatrice Nault-Charette, back to 1770.



Métis fiddler Morgan Grace played with a custom-made left-handed fiddle from Gliga, a Romanian company. The fiddle includes an infinity symbol on the side, as well as Grace's initials on the bottom.

"These lives are represented by the 250 individually hand-formed, smoke-enhanced, partially glazed, low-fire clay bowls displayed here. In this way, the voices of seven generations of Métis women have found a place here in Nakishkamohk, which means 'connection' in Michif – the name given by Métis Elder Verna DeMontigny to this bridge space between the WAG and Qaumajuq," Lafreniere told *Le Metis*.

"Each bowl symbolizes a Métis woman as a carrier of life and future potential. Some of the bowls have hand-carved designs that resemble Métis floral patterns."

Lafreniere said that historically, Métis women have not been duly recognized for their role in the birth of the Métis Nation.

"The intention of *Heartbeat of a Nation* is to acknowledge the strength, labour, and resiliency of Métis women's lives in the community," she said.

Fehr spoke about how Métis history has focused a lot on male pursuits.

"Both of my mother's parents were Métis, but I really felt that her mother and grandmother – and on and on – maybe hadn't been really visible in our history, and part of our legacy was kind of not really highlighted as much as maybe some of the battles," she said.

"I've had the opportunity to really do something that I wanted to do to recognize community, so the idea of the 250 bowls is not just about me and my family, it's about all of us. But it's also kind of bringing to life whatever lives were lived during those 250 years of whichever matriarchs – Métis women, aunties, cousins, sisters – and all of that that I wanted to kind of bring into focus so that we could look at our history more closely."

The idea for the exhibit started three years ago, during Fehr's Métis embroidery research, which led her to visit her three aunts who now live in British Columbia. Feeling that the lives of ordinary Métis women had been made invisible, Fehr – whose family

has deep roots in the Red River Settlement, St. Malo, and La Rochelle – spent time interviewing her aunts

to hear their life stories, and what it was like to grow up in a Métis community.

"And also, what it was like for them to grow up without mothers. We have three generations in my family where our mothers died very early, and so there was always that grief of loss from my generation, my aunt's generation, and my grandmother's. (In) my mother's generation...my grandmother's generation, all the women died prematurely, leaving young children. And the girls that were left had to raise the other kids, and raise the family," she said. "So, I wanted to acknowledge that difficulty and the strength that it took to be able to do that, and to come out of it, you know, reasonably OK, and not just reasonably OK, but creative, and (as) creators, and mothers and artists and workers and journalists and whatever those women had become."

The partnership between Fehr and IWS, is a natural fit, with both parties committed to advancing the voice and stories of Métis women across the Homeland. Fehr first spoke with Minister Anita Campbell, Spokesperson for IWS in February 2020 about her vision for her bowl project, which eventually extended into a partnership with the WAG.

However, the WAG exhibit is just one component of this ongoing project with IWS, with more interactive events upcoming. The original intent of the bowl distribution was for Fehr to partner with IWS to distribute the bowls in all seven regions, where IWS members would have an opportunity to connect with the bowls through community events. When the pandemic hit, this idea grew into a partnership with the WAG, but the initial intent of the project is still having the opportunity to come to fruition, with Fehr gifting bowls to IWS members after the close of the exhibition, in exchange for the name of a Métis woman. While the partnership between Fehr and IWS has been able to extend to a WAG exhibit, it will carry on long past its closure, as the IWS continues its work to uplift Métis women.

Handmade

Fehr, who works primarily in thread, textile, and clay, had been making ceramics for years. But for the last couple of years, she has been making bowls, giving them away to people to use for smudging. Receiving

a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts to start the project two years ago, Fehr spent a while perfecting the bowls, which she makes by hand.

"Then there's the carving part, which I love doing," she told *Le Metis*. "And then there's the first firing, which I do in the kiln, and then after that I do some glazing, and then they've got to be fired again."

Fehr uses a garbage can outdoors for the smoke firing, "and that gives the surface of the bowls that smoky look, which really adds to them," she said.

Once the exhibit has closed, the last part of the project will begin: 250 Métis Nation women will be gifted the bowls in partnership with the MMF and the IWS.

"What I'm going to ask people to do who receive a bowl is to give me the name of a Métis woman that they want to honour, and maybe a little bit about that woman, and I'm going to be turning that into a textile tapestry," Fehr said.

The exhibit already includes the start of that tapestry, with embroidered names and stories to become a living history of our Métis sisters.

"The accompanying textile pieces also perform a dialogue stretching back through time and across geography to bring forward voices not yet silenced," Lafreniere told *Le Metis*.

"As part of a larger program to 'domesticate' Indigenous women on Turtle Island in order to become 'proper' wives for French men of the colonies, Ursuline and Grey Nuns taught Métis women European domestic embroidery techniques. Although these early and continuous efforts to erase the 'Indian' had a long-lasting impact on generations of First Nations and Métis women, they also inadvertently revealed the rebellious Métis spirit – untainted, despite efforts made to assimilate, divide, and neutralize. That voice found its way into Métis women's embroidery by blending the best of the Indigenous and the European and, in doing so, birthing an enduring Métis identity and culture."

In her closing remarks, Fehr recalled a recent dream she had about her mother.

"There was a painting on the wall. And she emerged out of the painting and she was dancing. She was smiling at me, she was dancing. And to me that affirmed, you know, the joyfulness of her presence and for all of those mothers that came before us," Fehr said, "and she was there, and I get the sense that this is something that she would be very happy about."

Heartbeat of a Nation, on display at the WAG until November 6, is one of two exhibits by a Métis artist. Rosalie Favell's Family Legacy exhibit closes on September 12.