

## National Métis Veterans Monument

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The National Métis Veterans Monument, located at the Back to Batoche festival site, is on sacred ground. At Batoche, the Métis Nation made a stand against a colonial government whose relationship with Indigenous peoples was indifferent, cruel, and genocidal. The legacy of the 1885 Resistance—more than a century of Métis marginalization and colonization—reverberates to this day. That thousands of Métis would willingly enlist to defend a country that colonized them speaks to a fundamental generosity of spirit. It's little wonder that the "importance of Métis veterans to the Métis community cannot be understated. Our veterans occupy a point of honour at all Métis gatherings and cultural events."<sup>1</sup>

There could be no more fitting place to install a monument to honour Métis military members for their service to Canada than Batoche. Indeed, as the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) indicated in 2011—a few years before the monument was installed:

The Métis Veterans Memorial Monument will be a landmark for generations of Métis people to gather and pay homage to the servicemen and servicewomen who have served our country ... Already a site sacred to the Métis, Batoche is a fitting site for people to gather to remember and honour Métis Veterans. It is accessible to all Métis people and the general public.<sup>2</sup>

The monument is comprised of nine sleek, elegant granite columns set up in a semi-circle formation with central granite structure depicting original artwork by Dennis Weber. He portrayed images of those who served on land, sea, the women who served as well as 1885 veterans. The artwork is flanked by two Métis flags and the words, "To honour and remember all veterans and to express our pride and gratitude to the Métis servicemen and servicewomen who bravely served our country to preserve our freedom," in Michif, English, and French. The monument contains the names of 5,724 Métis men and women who served during the 1885 Resistance, the South African War, the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, numerous peacekeeping missions, and the Afghanistan War.

The idea to create this monument to honour Métis veterans had been around for some time. For instance, in 2009, the Métis Nation—Saskatchewan (MN—S) annual general assembly voted to have a cairn built at Batoche to be unveiled at the following year's Back to Batoche festival. The motion was put forward by Lennard Morin, the then MN—S Minister of Veterans Affairs and a veteran from Cumberland House, who wanted the Provincial Métis Council to fundraise for its construction and installation. The timing for this potential installation was planned to occur in 2010, which was designated as the "Year of the Métis."<sup>3</sup> When he was mayor of Cumberland House, Lennard Morin worked with local residents to install a cairn to honour the community's Métis veterans,<sup>4</sup> including 28 service members for the First World War, 32 for the Second World War, and four for the Korean War.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than building a cairn at Batoche to honour Métis veterans, it was soon decided to build a monument for Métis veterans from across the Métis Homeland. The project was supported by resolutions by both the MN—S and the Métis National Council (MNC) at their annual general assemblies.<sup>6</sup> However, before this national monument could be built, the MN—S built the Métis Veterans Memorial Gardens in 2010, which included 25 five-foot trees planted in a U-shape with a flower garden in its centre. The flower gardens were opened by a blessing with many veterans in attendance<sup>7</sup> and was attended by the Honourable John Duncan, then Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.<sup>8</sup> Also during the 2010 Back to Batoche festival, the Métis Honour Runners ran 100 kilometres from Saskatoon to Batoche to raise funds and promote the project.<sup>9</sup>

For many years prior to these developments, others were working to collect information about Métis veterans. For instance, in 1991, the MNC hired Dr. Cathy Littlejohn to conduct research to determine the number of Métis veterans and whether they received their entitled benefits for their service. When the funds for this initiative ran out, Cathy continued this important research at her own expense. From there, she gave her research to GDI. The Institute hired her to conduct further research on Métis veterans, which was used to compile her book, *Métis Soldiers of Saskatchewan: 1914-1953* in 2012. Cathy also worked with the Institute to verify the names of the veterans who would appear on the monument.<sup>10</sup> Her detailed research was greatly enhanced by community members and Métis groups throughout the Métis Homeland who provided hundreds of names of veterans, which were eventually inscribed on the monument.

One of the more interesting aspects of the project was its research component. As then GDI Executive Director, Geordy McCaffrey related when the monument was unveiled, "Military service records didn't include Métis as an ethnic category, therefore, the Institute and Cathy had to "go by family names, enlistment sites, and ... referrals by family. Some of the French names and Métis names are synonymous, so we had ... to do some research in terms of determining who are Métis and who are not."<sup>11</sup>

Earlier, in 1997, GDI published *Remembrances: Interviews with Métis Veterans*<sup>12</sup> and had worked since then to document Métis veterans' stories and collect veterans' photographs. Most of these resources are on the Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture ([www.metismuseum.ca](http://www.metismuseum.ca)).

In 2011, the project picked up momentum when Veterans Affairs Canada provided \$50,000 in funding for the monument's construction. The announcement was made during the Back to Batoche celebration, which also saw the MNC award Métis veterans who served in the Second World War and in the Korean War with the Order of the Métis Nation. David Chartrand, the President of the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) and the then MNC Minister of Veterans Affairs, publicly challenged the federal government to provide Métis veterans with their entitled benefits.<sup>13</sup>

At this time, GDI agreed to donate its time and resources to oversee the construction of the monument. The estimated cost to build the monument was \$300,000 and \$52,000 had

been raised to date. Under the auspices of the Institute's Métis Culture and Heritage Department, a campaign was launched to raise the remaining funding needed to build the monument via corporate sponsorship, private donations, and community fundraising activities. As a non-profit corporation, GDI was able to offer tax receipts for donations over \$20.00. The Institute actively encouraged Métis community members to provide the names of Métis servicemembers so they could be inscribed on the monument.<sup>14</sup> Both donations and veterans' names began to be received by the Institute in large quantities. Besides offering charitable receipts for donations, the Institute also developed fundraising packages for donors and worked with the MN—S Minister of Veterans Affairs on many of the project details.<sup>15</sup>

Geordy McCaffrey, the Institute's Executive Director at the time, indicated his excitement and optimism that this project would be successfully completed: "It is exciting and worthwhile ... The effort is large and it will require contributions from the kitchen table as well as the corporate boardroom. Everybody's going to have to roll up their sleeves and pitch in if they can." GDI would work with private companies, veterans' associations, the MNC's then governing members, and various provincial ministries to raise the necessary money to successfully complete this project.<sup>16</sup>

The Métis community generously supported GDI in its fundraising efforts. One example of this assistance occurred in 2011 when the Saskatchewan-based Indigenous news monthly, *Eagle Feather News* gave GDI four Saskatchewan Roughrider tickets, which were raffled among the Institute's employees. The raffle draw raised \$700, which went to the monument fund.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout 2012, the Institute engaged in an extensive fundraising campaign for the Métis veterans' monument project. In April 2012, for instance, GDI placed a full-sized public service announcement in *Eagle Feather News* to inform the community about the Métis Veterans Memorial Monument Project and to fundraise for it. In the announcement, the Institute indicated that it was chosen to oversee the building of this monument and sought donations to pay for its project cost of \$300,000. For a \$25 donation to the fundraising campaign, the Institute offered the CD, *Honouring our Heroes: A Tribute to Métis Veterans*, featuring music by Donny Parenteau, Andrea Menard, Ray St. Germain, Jess Lee, Mike Gouchie, and Krystle Pedersen.

For a \$50 donation, the Institute offered both the CD and Cathy Littlejohn's book, *Métis Soldiers of Saskatchewan: 1914-1953*. The Institute also provided community members with information on how to submit Métis veterans' names to be inscribed on the monument. This was important because the Institute's goal was "to ensure the monument recognizes and honours all of our Métis Veterans, past and present."<sup>18</sup>

The Institute also placed advertisements promoting this fundraising campaign in the October 2012 and November 2013 editions of *Eagle Feather News*.

Métis veteran Edwin St. Pierre was a strong advocate for the building of the National Métis Veterans Monument in Batoche. In 2012, he indicated his fear that many Métis Second

World and Korean War veterans would not live to see the monument built: “We want to complete it, we need funds to complete it, and we need it in the next four or five years because our veterans and their widows are disappearing.” For Edwin, the monument was vital because “Métis veterans are forgotten people ... they served, gave up their lives, [and] some came back in not very good shape.” He hoped that once the monument was built, Remembrance Day services could be observed at Batoche. Having the monument would also assist the remaining Métis veterans receive their benefits: “Veteran’s families never organized or pushed for recognition and it’s about time we did.”<sup>19</sup>

Edwin St. Pierre has been to every Remembrance Day ceremony at Batoche since the monument was erected in 2014 until his passing in 2024.

To close out 2012, *Eagle Feather News* told its readers that the Métis veterans tribute CD and the Métis soldiers’ book would make excellent Christmas presents while contributing to the building of the veterans’ monument.<sup>20</sup>

In 2013, the Métis veterans’ monument project picked up considerable momentum and a renewed sense of urgency to complete it. Good news came early in the year on February 8, 2013, when the MN—S’s Provincial Métis Council meeting passed a motion authorizing the Clarence Campeau Development Fund (CCDF) to release a \$100,000 capital grant to be used towards the construction of the monument during the 2013-2014 fiscal year.<sup>21</sup>

This new funding made the implementation of the the Métis Veteran’s Monument within reach. At this point, approximately \$236,000 was raised for the monument—from countless individual contributions as well as from the CCDF and the federal (Veterans Affairs Canada) and Saskatchewan governments (the Saskatchewan Community Initiatives Fund.)<sup>22</sup> Now that the project was reaching its funding goal of \$300,000, there was a pressing recognition that the monument needed to be built as soon as possible, particularly since Métis veterans were passing away every year. In addition, the federal and provincial funding grants had approaching expiry dates, and while the initial concept design was estimated at \$300,000 several years earlier, this cost had increased with time.

In April 2013, GDI consulted with a small group of Métis veterans to help guide the project’s direction within the budgetary and timeline realities.<sup>23</sup> As Geordy McCaffrey relates: “We talked to a number of veterans ... and we asked them what they wanted to see in the monument and slowly and surely we kind of changed the structure a bit and made it to fit what the veterans wanted.”<sup>24</sup>

During the 2013 Back to Batoche gathering, draft designs of the monument were prominently displayed to inform people about the project and to encourage the submission of veterans’ names for inclusion on the monument. The Institute hoped that the ground and substructure work would be completed by the fall of 2014. This work was being conducted by GDI and Round Prairie Ventures Inc.<sup>25</sup>

In May 2014, GDI was able to announce that the National Métis Veterans’ Monument would be unveiled during the following July at the Back to Batoche celebrations.<sup>26</sup> The

official unveiling ceremony for the monument would take place on July 19, 2014 at the Batoche Memorial Garden at 10:30 a.m. James Oloo, GDI's Research Coordinator, best summed up this good news: "After years of hard work and dedication ... the dream of having a Métis Veterans Memorial Monument at Batoche ... is finally becoming a reality."<sup>27</sup>

In the July 2014 edition of *Eagle Feather News*, GDI placed a full-page announcement inviting the community to the official unveiling of the National Métis Veterans Monument at the Back to Batoche celebration on July 19, 2014. The announcement indicated that the "Métis have always defended their right to be free people" and the monument expressed a "long-held dream of the Métis to honour and commemorate the contributions of ... Métis veterans who have valiantly served our nation and defended our land and freedom." The monument was a "fitting tribute to our veterans and will remind us of the sacrifices they made so we can enjoy our freedom and spend time with family and friends, *the Métis way*, at Batoche."<sup>28</sup>

The announcement also thanked the monument's major sponsors as well as individual donors, indicating that "over two-thirds of the cost of the monument has been realized."<sup>29</sup>

The National Métis Veterans Monument was formally unveiled at Batoche on July 19, 2014 during the Back to Batoche festival before hundreds of people, including many Métis veterans. The Institute was effusive in its praise of the veterans and all those, who in their own way, made the veterans monument a reality. "It is with heartfelt sincerity that we honour our Métis veterans who bravely served our country to preserve our freedom. Their service ... is a contribution for which all Canadians can be grateful and proud." GDI also extended its gratitude to all those who "have helped make this tribute a reality through the many contributions made, including funding, in-kind contributions, and donations."<sup>30</sup>

The hour-long unveiling ceremony's program, included the Métis National Anthem, an opening prayer, opening remarks, tributes, presentations to veterans, closing remarks, a closing prayer, and "O Canada."<sup>31</sup> Dignitaries included Robert Doucette, MN—S President, Lennard Morin, MN—S Minister of Veterans Affairs, Clément Chartier, MNC President, David Chartrand, MMF President and MNC Minister of Veterans Affairs, Rob Clarke, MP for Desnethé-Missinippi-Churchill River, and Delbert Kirsch, MLA for Batoche. All these honoured guests thanked the Institute for taking the lead role in ensuring that the monument was successfully built.<sup>32</sup>

Geordy McCaffrey, GDI's Executive Director, was the event's master of ceremonies. He discussed the Institute's pride in being involved with this project and in seeing it come to a successful fruition, and further stated that more than 7,000 veterans' names on the monument would be inscribed by 2015.<sup>33</sup>

President Chartier noted his pride in seeing the monument unveiled and was gracious in his praise for those whose vision and work saw the monument constructed.

To witness the unveiling of a magnificent monument for our veterans on this sacred soil of the Métis Nation is a powerful and poignant experience for me.

... This monument speaks to the vision and determination of Lennard Morin, a great Métis patriot, and to the superb work of the Gabriel Dumont Institute in fulfilling that vision.<sup>34</sup>

At the ceremony, Lennard Morin mentioned how he worried that the monument wouldn't be built. There were numerous cabinet shuffles and different Veterans Affairs ministers during this process. However, that didn't stop those who wanted to build the monument to realize their dream. It was especially important to recognize the veterans sacrifice, because many of them—like his uncles came home—broken men. "They came home, but they were emotionally scarred and traumatized and there was no counselling in those days."<sup>35</sup>

Métis musicians, Donny Parenteau, Andrea Menard, Jess Lee, and JJ Lavalee performed at the unveiling. Donny Parenteau asked the audience to give the veterans a standing ovation, which they did. More than 100 "Honour Runners," consisting of Métis youth, current service members, and veterans who ran the approximately 100 km from Saskatoon to Batoche to pay homage to Métis veterans were also acknowledged.<sup>36</sup>

John McDonald, an 81-year-old who served in Korea and a long-term peacetime soldier, was one of the veterans in attendance. The dedication meant a great deal to him as a tribute to the sacrifice of Métis veterans and he hoped that "every memorial day that we have here is attended as much as it is today."<sup>37</sup>

To conclude the ceremony, veteran Edwin St. Pierre and his wife, Harriet Oakes St. Pierre recited the Act of Remembrance in English and in Michif before the "Last Post" was played and a moment of silence was observed.<sup>38</sup>

On July 16, 2016, the first engraving of veterans' names on the monument was unveiled to the public. In a Facebook announcement for the unveiling, the Institute indicated that funding for the monument's upkeep and future engravings would be ongoing. This would ensure that the "monument will forever be a place to pay our respects to Métis servicemen and servicewomen." At this time, GDI announced that a directory for the monument would soon be available onsite and on the Institute's website.<sup>39</sup>

Almost 200 people attended the engraving's unveiling ceremony, which was a clear sign that the "service and sacrifice of the Métis will never be forgotten."<sup>40</sup> At the ceremony, the MMF indicated that it would cover the \$35,000 shortfall needed to pay for the monument. At this time, both presidents Clément Chartier and David Chartrand called on the federal government to do more to assist Métis veterans, particularly those who served in the Second World War since they "were the only group excluded from reparations and settlements."<sup>41</sup> Three years later, in 2019, the Government of Canada officially recognized the sacrifice of Métis veterans and created a \$30 million-dollar fund to compensate Second World War veterans and to "support commemorative initiatives that promote awareness and appreciation of Métis Veterans' sacrifices and contributions."<sup>42</sup>

Media coverage of the monument continued throughout 2016. It paid particular focus on the online app being developed by GDI to allow community members to search and see the names engraved on the monument. There was also an ongoing call to collect further names. Karon Shmon, Director of the Institute's Department of Métis Heritage and Culture, said that the process to collect veterans' names was ongoing and that names on the monument are randomly ordered, "because if you go by order of conflict or alphabetically, what do you do when you get new names? This way they are spaced to fit the columns, and you can search the database to find which pillar and even which row."<sup>43</sup>

From 2017 onwards, GDI promoted the National Métis Veterans' Memorial Monument app and the online adjunct on the Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture ([http://www.metismuseum.ca/metisveteransmonument.](http://www.metismuseum.ca/metisveteransmonument))<sup>44</sup> GDI created the app to "bring the monument to all Métis across Canada, including those who are unable to travel to Batoche to see the monument in person." Moreover, since visits to the monument are unguided, this app could assist visitors find names on it. The Institute also indicated that fundraising for the monument's upkeep and future engraving would be ongoing.<sup>45</sup>

In the past few years, the National Métis Veterans Monument was recognized by other institutions, including Veterans Affairs Canada<sup>46</sup>, Royal Roads College<sup>47</sup>, and Library and Archives Canada.<sup>48</sup>

In 2022, GDI put out a call to community members to provide the names of veterans for the second engraving of the monument.<sup>49</sup> In November 2022, a further 306 names were inscribed on the monument.

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<sup>1</sup> "Métis Veterans Memorial Project: Celebrating our Métis Heroes," *New Nation Magazine*, Fall 2011, 5.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Riel Included in Plans for Metis War Vets Cairn," MBC Radio. November 16, 2009. <https://www.mbcradio.com/2010/08/riels-included-in-plans-for-metis-war-vets-cairn>.

<sup>4</sup> "Back to Batoche honours Métis veterans," *Eagle Feather News*, August 2016, 10.

<sup>5</sup> James Oloo, "Métis Veterans Monument Unveiled at Batoche," *GDI Communicator*, July 2014, 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> James Oloo, "Métis Veterans' Monument Update," *GDI Communicator*, August 2013, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Sandy Arndt, "Métis veterans to be recognized with memorial in Batoche," *Saskatchewan Sage*, Vol. 15, No. 12 (2011). <https://ammsa.com/publications/saskatchewan-sage/metis-veterans-be-recognized-memorial-batoche>.

<sup>8</sup> James Oloo, "Métis Veterans Monument to be Unveiled on July 19," *GDI Communicator*, June 2014, 3.

<sup>9</sup> "Métis Veterans Memorial Project: Celebrating our Métis Heroes."

<sup>10</sup> Oloo, "Métis Veterans' Monument Update."

<sup>11</sup> Thia James, "Memorial honouring Métis veterans unveiled," *paNow*, July 19, 2014. <https://panow.com/2014/07/20/photos-memorial-honouring-metis-veterans-unveiled>.

<sup>12</sup> "Métis Veterans Monument unveiled at Batoche," *Eagle Feather News*, August 2014, 10-11.

<sup>13</sup> "Memorial will honour Métis veterans of foreign wars," *Eagle Feather News*, August 2011, 4.

<sup>14</sup> "Métis Veterans Memorial Project: Celebrating our Métis Heroes."

<sup>15</sup> 2011-2012 Gabriel Dumont Institute Annual Report, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Sandy Arndt, "Métis veterans to be recognized with memorial in Batoche," *Saskatchewan Sage*, Vol. 15, No. 12 (2011). <https://ammsa.com/publications/saskatchewan-sage/metis-veterans-be-recognized-memorial-batoche>.

<sup>17</sup> Lisa Wilson, "Métis Veterans Monument," *GDI Communicator*, December 2011, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Gabriel Dumont Institute, "Métis Veterans Memorial Monument Project," *Eagle Feather News*, April 2012, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Meagan Thomas, "Métis veterans may all pass before memorial completed," *Eagle Feather News*, November 2012, 13.

<sup>20</sup> "Some great Christmas gift ideas with an Indigenous touch in mind," *Eagle Feather News*, December 2012, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Métis Nation—Saskatchewan, *Meeting of the Provincial Métis Council of the Métis Nation—Saskatchewan*, February 8-9, 2013, 8. <https://metisnationsk.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/PMC-Meeting-Minutes-2013.02.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> "Métis Veterans Memorial Monument Unveiling Ceremony," *Eagle Feather News*, July 2014, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Lisa Wilson, "Veterans' Monument Update," *GDI Communicator*, March 2013, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Oloo, "Memorial honouring Métis veterans unveiled."

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- <sup>25</sup> Oloo, "Métis Veterans' Monument Update."
- <sup>26</sup> James Oloo, "War Memorials: Métis Veterans' Monument," *GDI Communicator*, May 2014, 4.
- <sup>27</sup> James Oloo, "Métis Veterans Monument to be Unveiled on July 19," *GDI Communicator*, June 2014, 3.
- <sup>28</sup> "Métis Veterans Memorial Monument Unveiling Ceremony," *Eagle Feather News*, July 2014, 15.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> "Métis Veterans Memorial Monument Unveiling Ceremony," GDI Website, August 11, 2014.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> James Oloo, "Métis Veterans Monument Unveiled at Batoche," *GDI Communicator*, July 2014, 1-2.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Oloo, "Memorial honouring Métis veterans unveiled."
- <sup>36</sup> Oloo, "Métis Veterans Monument Unveiled at Batoche."
- <sup>37</sup> Oloo, "Memorial honouring Métis veterans unveiled."
- <sup>38</sup> "Métis Veterans Monument unveiled at Batoche."
- <sup>39</sup> GDI Facebook, July 3, 2016.
- <sup>40</sup> GDI Facebook, July 17, 2016.
- <sup>41</sup> "Back to Batoche honours Métis veterans," 10.
- <sup>42</sup> "Government of Canada recognizes the pre- and post-Second World War experiences of Métis Veterans," Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/veterans-affairs-canada/news/2019/09/government-of-canada-recognizes-the-pre--and-post-second-world-war-experiences-of-metis-veterans.html>.
- <sup>43</sup> "Batoche monument pays tribute to all Métis veterans," *Eagle Feather News*, November 2016, 7.
- <sup>44</sup> GDI Facebook, July 6, 2017.
- <sup>45</sup> "Métis Veterans' Monument," GDI Website, October 11, 2017. <https://www.metismuseum.ca/metisveteransmonument/explore.php>
- <sup>46</sup> "National Métis Veterans' Memorial Monument," Veterans Affairs Canada. <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/national-inventory-canadian-memorials/details/9088>.
- <sup>47</sup> "War Memories across Canada Conversation Kit: The Great Equalizer Métis Veterans Memorial Monument Batoche, Saskatchewan," Royal Roads University. <https://warheritage.royalroads.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/15.-M%C3%A9tis-Veterans-Memorial-conversation-kit.pdf>.
- <sup>48</sup> David Horky, "Recognition and Remembrance: A Métis soldier in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1917–1918," Library and Archives Canada Blog. <https://thediscoverblog.com/tag/national-metis-veterans-memorial-monument>.

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<sup>49</sup> "Additional Engraving of names for the Métis Veterans Memorial Monument Ongoing," GDI Website.