



**The Alberta Labour
History Institute 2018 Calendar**

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES & THE BUILDING OF ALBERTA

<div>January</div> <div><div>S</div><div>M</div><div>T</div><div>W</div><div>T</div><div>F</div><div>S</div><div>1</div><div>2</div><div>3</div><div>4</div><div>5</div><div>6</div><div>7</div><div>8</div><div>9</div><div>10</div><div>11</div><div>12</div><div>13</div><div>14</div><div>15</div><div>16</div><div>17</div><div>18</div><div>19</div><div>20</div><div>21</div><div>22</div><div>23</div><div>24</div><div>25</div><div>26</div><div>27</div><div>28</div><div>29</div><div>30</div><div>31</div></div>	<div>February</div> <div><div>S</div><div>M</div><div>T</div><div>W</div><div>T</div><div>F</div><div>S</div><div>1</div><div>2</div><div>3</div><div>4</div><div>5</div><div>6</div><div>7</div><div>8</div><div>9</div><div>10</div><div>11</div><div>12</div><div>13</div><div>14</div><div>15</div><div>16</div><div>17</div><div>18</div><div>19</div><div>20</div><div>21</div><div>22</div><div>23</div><div>24</div><div>25</div><div>26</div><div>27</div><div>28</div></div>	<div>March</div> <div><div>S</div><div>M</div><div>T</div><div>W</div><div>T</div><div>F</div><div>S</div><div>1</div><div>2</div><div>3</div><div>4</div><div>5</div><div>6</div><div>7</div><div>8</div><div>9</div><div>10</div><div>11</div><div>12</div><div>13</div><div>14</div><div>15</div><div>16</div><div>17</div><div>18</div><div>19</div><div>20</div><div>21</div><div>22</div><div>23</div><div>24</div><div>25</div><div>26</div><div>27</div><div>28</div><div>29</div><div>30</div><div>31</div></div>
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INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THE BUILDING OF ALBERTA

The colonial portrait of Indigenous peoples suggested that they lacked both the work ethic and technological know-how of Europeans. It was a lie. During a period of over 10,000 years, Indigenous peoples in Alberta had developed complex systems of survival and a knowledge and appreciation of the natural environment that went beyond the often purely instrumental knowledge of the Europeans. It was only because of Indigenous assistance that European explorers were able to “discover” the rivers and lakes of the region. Indeed, the whole notion of European “discovery” of places in Canada is a hoax, since the First Nations had discovered every part of what became Canada thousands of years before any European explorer came anywhere near Alberta or any other part of Canada.

Indigenous peoples in Alberta, like their counterparts in other regions, formed a partnership with the Europeans in the fur trade. It was a complex partnership because the fur-trading companies could not operate without Indigenous trappers and guides but nonetheless sought to limit the share of fur-trading profits that these indispensable workers received.

The fate of First Nations and Métis was much worse in the settlement period than during the fur trade.

American hunters slaughtered the bison that had provided sustenance to Prairie peoples for millennia, earning profits for makers of buffalo robes and companies that used bison hides to make assembly line belts for industry. Recognizing a need to supplement traditional work with agricultural pursuits, First Nations signed treaties to share their lands with the colonial power. But the latter interpreted those agreements to share land as “land surrenders.”

Indigenous people became unwillingly a cheap labour force in the new profit-driven economy imposed by the Europeans. Their work tasks, as we see throughout this Calendar, were varied and gendered. But until very recent times, the opportunity for Indigenous people to participate in all types of work was restricted with most professional and administrative jobs unavailable to them because of systemic racism. Trade unions until relatively recently shared the racist assumptions that were general throughout Canadian society. But gradually Indigenous people did get to join unions and eventually to take leadership roles within them. Indigenous people have played a major role in inspiring the trade union movement to become part of the broader movement for social justice.



MILLENNIA OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

For at least ten millennia before they ever met a European, Indigenous peoples in Alberta worked together to carve out complex civilizations. Inspired by deep religious beliefs with origins in their close association with the natural world, Indigenous people's values reflected egalitarian concepts and respect for all animals and plants that Creator had willed into being along with humans. Nehiwayak (Cree), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and Dene people alike gave credit to Creator for their ever-developing technical skills and knowledge that made it possible for them to make use for their survival of almost every animal and plant available in their environment. Prairie peoples learned and worked together not only to hunt buffalo but to determine which buffalo offered the most food value. They also learned to use parts of the animal to make clothing, toboggans, cutlery, and powder flasks. The Dene similarly worked together as fishers and hunters of caribou and small game.

*A Cree man in his canoe, illustrated by Edward S. Curtis ca. 1910.
Glenbow Archives, NA- 1700-6*

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WOMEN'S WORK, MEN'S WORK

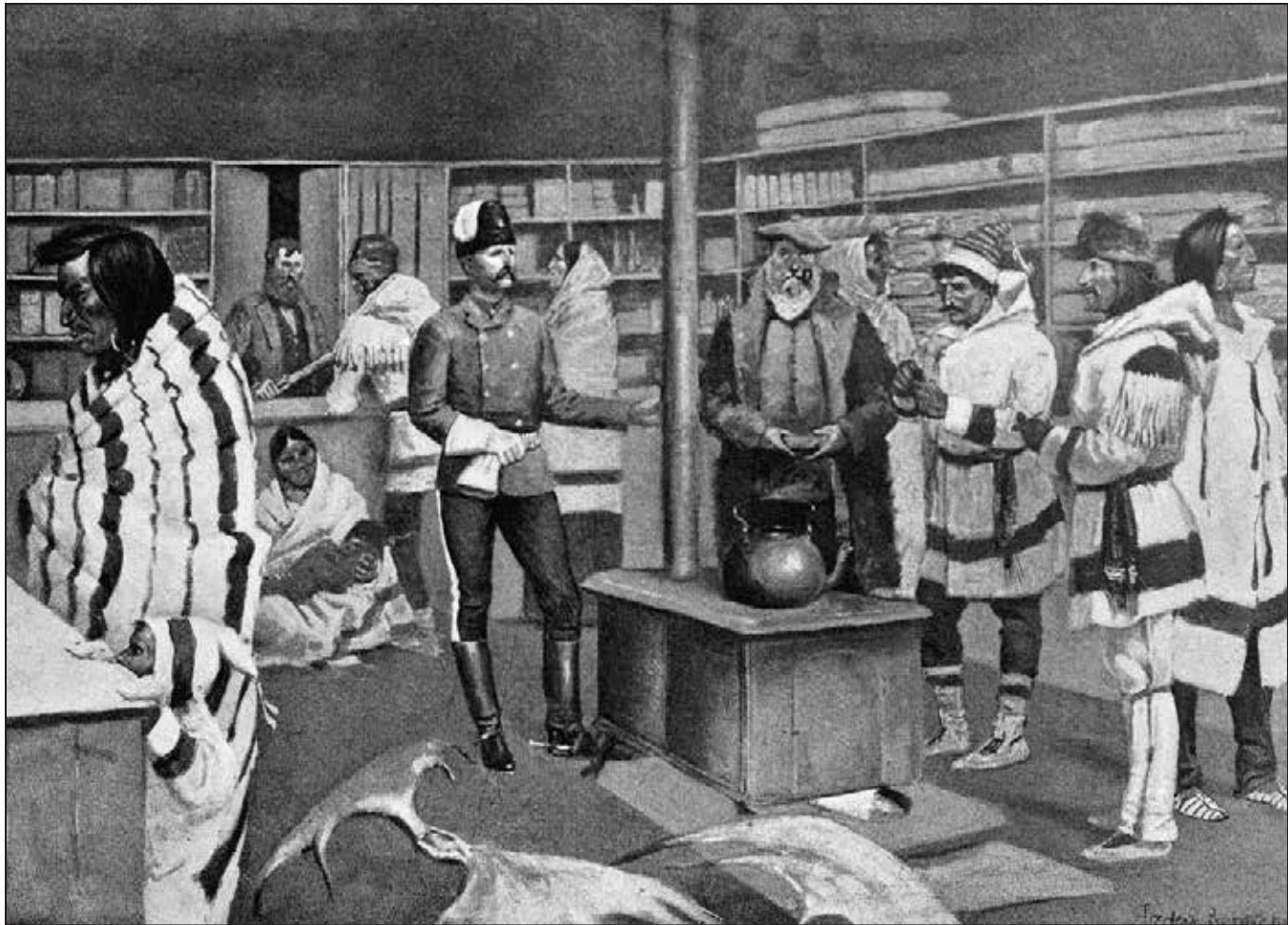
Women and men played equal, though different, roles in the traditional Indigenous economy. Among the Dene, men hunted caribou while women hunted smaller game, and harvested berries and other edible plants. Men manufactured boats and hunting tools, while women produced all the household goods and clothing. Women played the primary roles in child care. Among the Nehiwayak (Cree) of the parklands, women constructed tipis from caribou or moose hides while the men made canoes from birchbark. Among both Dene and Nehiwayak, women hauled to camp the carcasses of animals hunted by the men, butchered the meat, and transported camp members' possessions when camp was moved. They were not considered the "weaker sex." Among the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), the buffalo hunt involved both men and women with men preparing for the kill and women choosing the animals from the kill that would best provide the needs of the people. Both women and men were involved in transforming parts of the buffalo into goods needed by the Niitsitapi.

*Indigenous woman carrying her baby in a cradle board.
Provincial Archives of Alberta, P149*

FEBRUARY

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THE FUR TRADE

Indigenous peoples were essential to the success of the fur trade that brought Europeans to the Canadian Prairies. Only they knew where to find and trap the animals whose furs the Europeans wanted and to prepare them for European markets. Indigenous people bargained shrewdly for the European goods that they wanted in trade for their furs and for buffalo meat consumed at trading posts. But the fur-trading companies had class and racial hierarchies which placed Indigenous peoples in the bottom rung. In the Hudson's Bay Company, for example, no First Nation person ever served as governor, chief factor, chief trader, or even clerk. Only a few Métis ever reached the chief trader or clerk positions. Indigenous men served as boatmen, guides, interpreters, and canoe builders within the company while Indigenous women produced items such as footwear and canoe sails while tanning hides, dressing furs for shipment abroad, growing vegetables, hunting small animals and fishing.

*Painting of interior of a HBC trading post.
Glenbow Archives, NA-77-1*

MARCH

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DISPOSSESSION BY THE SETTLER STATE

Viewed as essential during the fur-trading period, Indigenous people were seen as simply in the way during the settlement or agricultural period. The Euro-Canadian government pressured Prairie First Nation people into accepting treaties that placed them on scattered, tiny reserves with few resources. Indigenous families were given only 10 acres of land for farming compared to the 160 acres granted to white settlers. Promised aid for a transition to farming and ranching was rarely provided. When Indigenous people managed to be successful despite the odds, as they were in southern Alberta ranching country, the government stole some of their land and granted it to white settlers. Their children were forcibly placed in off-reserve residential schools. Lands promised to Métis families after the first of two resistances led by Louis Riel to dispossession by settlers in 1870 was also not forthcoming. Indigenous people attempted to maintain their traditional economies as much as possible and to supplement their incomes through paid employment.

*Cree students in Hobbema, Alberta, in a residential school, 1890.
Glenbow Archives, NA-682-5*

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International Day of Mourning

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MÉTIS STRUGGLES FOR JUSTICE

After the second Northwest Resistance led by Louis Riel met military defeat, the Métis faced endless difficulties in finding homes and work. Constantly pushed out of areas where they attempted to settle and continue their existence as a people, they became “road allowance” people, living on crown lands that would eventually be developed as roads or other public works. A provincial commission established in 1934 to examine the Métis plight found that 90 percent of Alberta Métis suffered from tuberculosis while paralysis, blindness, and syphilis were widespread. Alberta created six Métis settlements where health care and education were provided, but there was no economic base. Métis efforts in recent years to defend traditional hunting and fishing territories were largely ignored by the provincial government. But in 2014 the Supreme Court ruled that Métis, as a distinct Aboriginal group, had the same rights as First Nations and Inuit to federal financial support and to the negotiation of land rights.

*Métis family, Fort Vermilion, 1900.
Provincial Archives of Alberta, B7256*

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INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND WORK IN THE PERIOD OF DISPOSSESSION

A common racist stereotype presents Canada's Indigenous peoples as unwilling to work in the paid labour force and anxious to live off federal welfare monies. In fact, Indigenous people have worked in most sectors of the Canadian economy, despite prejudices that made them "last hired, first fired" and that deprived them of educational opportunities. Indigenous people worked in canneries, mines, mills, and in homes as domestics. They fished commercially, served as lumberjacks, and continued to trap furs. The Mohawk developed a specialization as steel workers. In the Prairie provinces, Indigenous people worked in railway construction, forest firefighting, and as agricultural workers. In the 1920s many fall harvests relied on Indigenous workers. After World War II in Alberta, Indigenous people became the main labourers in the sugar beet fields. The sugar beet farmers lobbied the federal government to cut Indigenous social assistance payments in summertime. In 1990, there were 2500 Indigenous seasonal agricultural workers in the province.

Trimmerman Tom Molyneaux in portable sawmill, Sunchild Reserve, winter of 1954-55. Provincial Archives of Alberta, A 12050

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INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND UNIONS (1)

There have been Indigenous trade unionists in Canada for over 150 years. In the 1950s over half of the Kahnawake Mohawk high steel workers were unionized. But relations between Indigenous peoples and unions have always been contentious. Before World War Two, many trade unions excluded non-whites from membership and from apprenticeships. When formal exclusions ended, informal exclusions from membership and later from positions within unions became common. In the 1960s Alberta trade unions campaigned for human rights legislation that included the workplace and housing. By the 1980s some unions had begun actively to seek Indigenous involvement in leadership. Indigenous workers benefited from union wages and benefits when they worked in unionized workplaces. But most Indigenous people worked in jobs that were seasonal or for small employers that unions found difficult to unionize. Sometimes, on reserves, when Indigenous workers tried to unionize, they faced hostile chiefs and band councils who argued suspiciously that trade unions were incompatible with Indigenous traditions.

*Jim Cardinal, Communications, Energy and Paperworkers activist,
Courtesy of the Alberta Federation of Labour*

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RACISM IN HIRING

In the 1960s Muriel Stanley-Venne headed up Native Outreach for three years, a temporary federal program to encourage more hirings of Indigenous people. She worked tirelessly to find work for her people in every sector, and with some success. But, on the whole, “my people couldn’t get past the front door.” The higher the pay offered in particular sectors, the less likely that Indigenous people would receive any consideration. While few unions were helpful, Jack Dyck, business manager of the Labourers’ Union worked closely with Stanley-Venne to find opportunities in construction for Indigenous people. Over time, labour shortages would prove helpful to reducing employer unwillingness to hire First Nations and Métis workers. Still, Aboriginal unemployment remained higher than for other Albertans. In 2008, the Indigenous unemployment rate was 10.4 percent and rose to 13.9 percent in 2009 as recession deepened. For non-Indigenous workers, the rate rose from 6 to 8 percent.

Muriel Stanley-Venne

AUGUST

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Heritage Day



INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND UNIONS (2)

CUPE Saskatchewan has developed a course called “Unionism on Turtle Island” in an effort to combat racism. CUPE’s National Aboriginal Circle and PSAC’s Aboriginal Peoples’ Network unite Indigenous union members in efforts to promote solidarity, determine issues for their union to raise in collective bargaining, and promote awareness of Indigenous issues throughout their union. The AFL has two positions set aside on its executive for Indigenous people and various member unions follow a similar policy. Indigenous unionists advocate for equity programs in hiring to be implemented in collective bargaining contracts. They have also asked that their unions bargain for clauses for the presence of elders in workplaces, and the right of Indigenous workers to attend spiritual and cultural events. Indigenous unionists have also called for education in workplaces to confront racist assumptions and teach Indigenous history. They have called on unions to establish programs that aid Indigenous people to take leadership positions within unions.

Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) woman tanning a small hide in front of a tent and wagon, Fort McLeod territory, c. 1902 Provincial Archives of Alberta A 11094

SEPTEMBER

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

AUGUST 2018						
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Labour Day

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FIGHTING BOTH RACISM AND SEXISM

When Doreen Wabasca was a child in the 1940s, her parents placed her and her siblings in a Catholic boarding school weekdays so that they could both work. The nuns forbid their charges from speaking Cree. Throughout her subsequent life, Doreen was determined both to maintain her Indigenous traditions and language and to seek well paid work that she was qualified to do. Most jobs that she took on had been restricted to white men. Working both as a fisher and construction worker with her dad in Lesser Slave Lake, Doreen took training in open cut construction in Edmonton and with help from Native Outreach, was hired to do road maintenance work by the City of Edmonton in the 1960s. She faced racism and sexism from her fellow workers but rose to become their supervisor. Then she struck out on her own as a self-employed trucker before taking construction jobs in Fort McMurray.

Doreen Wabasca

OCTOBER

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INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND UNIONS (3)

Angela Fiddler is an activist in Local 401 of UFCW. A member of the Waterhen Cree Nation in Northern Saskatchewan, she has worked as a cook and later housekeeper in oilfield camps in Fort McMurray so as to earn enough income to give her kids a good chance in life. She was incensed that Indigenous workers lacked opportunities to smudge with sweetgrass on the premises. She decided to become a shop steward to fight for her people's right to practise their spiritual activities in their workplace. Her union took her side and even put her on their negotiating team. The company finally agreed to an arrangement acceptable to Indigenous workers. Next she and the union fought successfully to allow Indigenous workers to participate in Aboriginal Day. Interviewed in 2015, Angela said her next goal was a formal quota for Indigenous workers. "...if it wasn't for the union, I wouldn't have been able to accomplish anything."

Cree-Métis scraping a large moose hide, Waterton River Area, Northern Saskatchewan, 1930. Provincial Archives of Alberta, PR 2006.0528 0020

NOVEMBER

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

OCTOBER 2018

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DECEMBER 2018

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Daylight Savings
Ends

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Remembrance Day

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"I've seen over the years where Aboriginal people that are union members start to get involved, then they just drop off. I don't know if it's because they don't get the support they need...it runs across a lot of the unions here in the province, that human rights issues are not really, they're not up there with the rest. When you talk about education it's collective bargaining, steward training, that sort of stuff. When you get to the stuff around human rights, then the unions aren't as willing to fund members to attend...we had suggested this by the human rights committee a number of years ago...that there should be a racist and discrimination module attached to each course at the school, and that should be the first thing that is talked about when the school starts." –Linda Robinson, Indigenous unionist and retired long-time financial administrator for the Alberta Federation of Labour.

Linda Robinson

DECEMBER

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

NOVEMBER 2018

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Christmas Eve (24)
New Year's Eve (31)

Christmas Day

Boxing Day

2018



The Alberta Labour History Institute would like to recognize
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