



Métis crossing, a gat

Métis Crossing is a beautiful place. Its setting on the river offers abundant opportunities for watching deer and moose, otters, beavers, pelicans, eagles, and other wildlife.

The grounds are indeed historic: the gravelled footpaths are laid on the old Victoria Trail, which was essentially a pair of wagon ruts that Red River oxcarts used to traverse between Fort Edmonton and Fort Garry (now Winnipeg). The original Cromarty home stands on the grounds, moved a short distance from its original location; the home of Ben Sinclair, a blacksmith, pig farmer, and fiddler has been moved from the Lobstick site. Sinclair's wife Véronique was the community's midwife, and the couple raised ten children of their own.

The Cromarty and Sinclair

houses have been restored and offer interpretive programming for visitors.

In the grass near the old trail, a patch of horseradish from Anne Cromarty's garden still grows, perhaps 150 years after it was first planted.

But it would be a mistake to think of Métis Crossing as a musty bit of old prairie history. There is a sense that time runs through the place just as surely as the Victoria Trail itself; and while history's path begins in the past, it leads the way to a bright, dynamic future.

Amid the beautifully restored old structures at Métis Crossing, there stands a gleaming new Cultural Gathering Centre. The facility was designed by Métis Architect Tiffany Shaw-Collinge from Manasc Isaac Architects, and incorporates traditional craftsmanship with modern

materials. It suggests the building style of the fur trade era river-lot homes with an open hearth, dovetail timbers, and flexible space in the "pull up a chair let's eat" or "move the table, let's dance" tradition.

A huge window looks onto a massive covered deck, with a broad, gorgeous river view on its open side. There is also a smaller elevated deck.

The Lodge At Métis Crossing, a 40-room boutique hotel, will open for guests this fall.

Helping visitors to connect history to the present and the future is Lilyrose Meyers, who holds the position of Traditional Knowledge Holder and Teacher. (Her business card was printed with "knowledge keeper" as part of her title, but she crossed it out and wrote in "knowledge holder." She insists she doesn't "keep" her historical and

traditional knowledge—she merely holds it so she can share it.)

Lilyrose grew up near High Prairie, and has lived more recently at Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement. She is familiar with the old ways, and she's happy to have conversations about how the story of Métis Crossing relates to the shared experience of Métis people across the West.

She also offers workshops in traditional art, including birchbark basket-making, moose-hair tufting, porcupine quill decorative work, and more.

Lilyrose says it's important for visitors, whether they are Métis or not, to see the traditional crafts and to get a sense of how things were done. "They've seen them in museums," she said, "but they never had a chance to really touch them.

"We're not a museum in a





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sense. You can touch things. You know, we don't say hands off. This is not a hands-off place. We do winter programs, put on snowshoes and go out. I show how to set snares and traps, and we talk about what you can gather in the wintertime for survival. Rose hips are always in the bush, sometimes high-bush cranberries, different things you can make teas from for energy, and we build a survival shelter.

"To experience all those things, that's what we're here for. So they get back to the grassroots, back to the basics. The basics are still fun. We have a lot of plans, I think we're going to be having some cross-country ski trails or snowshoe trails. It's growing in leaps and bounds," she said.

Lilyrose was involved in

Métis Crossing when it first opened in 2005. At that time the concept was of a historical village on the site—that concept has been realized and is still growing. The project's visionary executive director was Juanita Marois, who since spent some time away raising her family. She has been back at Métis Crossing for the past three years, and Lilyrose says the whole project has come alive.

"Over the years it kind of just kind of sat in limbo. They had school events going on, but nothing major," Lilyrose said. "They got her back three years ago and she's our captain now. And wow, she's a pretty good captain to have at the helm!"

"She asked me to come. They asked me to come back as soon as the knowledge holder and a teacher. I'm here serving with her, and I've been back here for two years. I feel like I've been

here forever, and I love the place. I mean, I've got a great job. I get to meet great people, you know, sit and talk, and that's so cool."

The new building and the soon-to-open Lodge are part of the plan to operate year-round—a plan that has been slightly delayed.

"Covid had plans too, to delay everything" Lilyrose said.

"It takes time. Now we're open year-round. We've had programs running for the last four years.

"Some of the main ones are Paddle to the Past, a re-enactment of the voyageurs' canoe all the way down to Fort Victoria. We've had a partnership with Fort Victoria, and so there's a lot of projects, like the buffalo paddocks that are in progress right now. That's pretty exciting, to bring buffalo back."

Lilyrose says it's important for Métis people to be aware of their past, and it's just as important for different peoples to understand each other. Everything and everybody, she says, is connected by our sharing of the air, the water, and the land.

"Right here, the natural beauty here of the river, that's what the ancestors left. And that's one of the things I always say, the ancestors gave us purpose, direction and hope. They gave us life."

But, she says, it's now up to us to take care of what we have inherited. And that's what the experience of Métis Crossing can inspire.

"A lot of people will come and just sit along the bank or come here and feel the energy here. And I want to keep it alive," she said.

