

THE ASSEMBLAGE OF KIKINO (“OUR HOME”): Métis Material Culture and Architectural Design in the Alberta Settlements¹

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*A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding.*²

- Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking.”

With the establishment of the Alberta settlements through the Métis Population Betterment Act in 1938, came a rare geographical condition immensely significant to the mixed-blood people of the Canadian Prairies—a boundary. These lines drawn throughout the Albertan landscape fulfilled the primary demand of a devastated Métis community, which was the opportunity “to improve their socio-economic position by utilizing the resources of the settlement lands.”³ The Métis in Alberta struggled disproportionately during the 1930s as their traditional hunting and fishing territories were increasingly ceded to westward homesteading, leaving them to live in circumstances that have been described as “pitiable,”⁴ “desperate,”⁵ and “deplorable.”⁶ The establishment of the new territories thus offered an immediate homeland that could provide sustenance and cultural preservation, along with an urgent sense of hope. Given that minimal built infrastructure existed at the time of their establishment,⁷ there was essentially a blank geographical canvas on which to design and build a profound sense of place where, as Carl Jung eloquently stated, “all the yearnings and hopes of the soul are adequately expressed.”⁸ The decision by Kikino, one of the present-day settlements, to rename itself after the Cree word for “our home” reflects

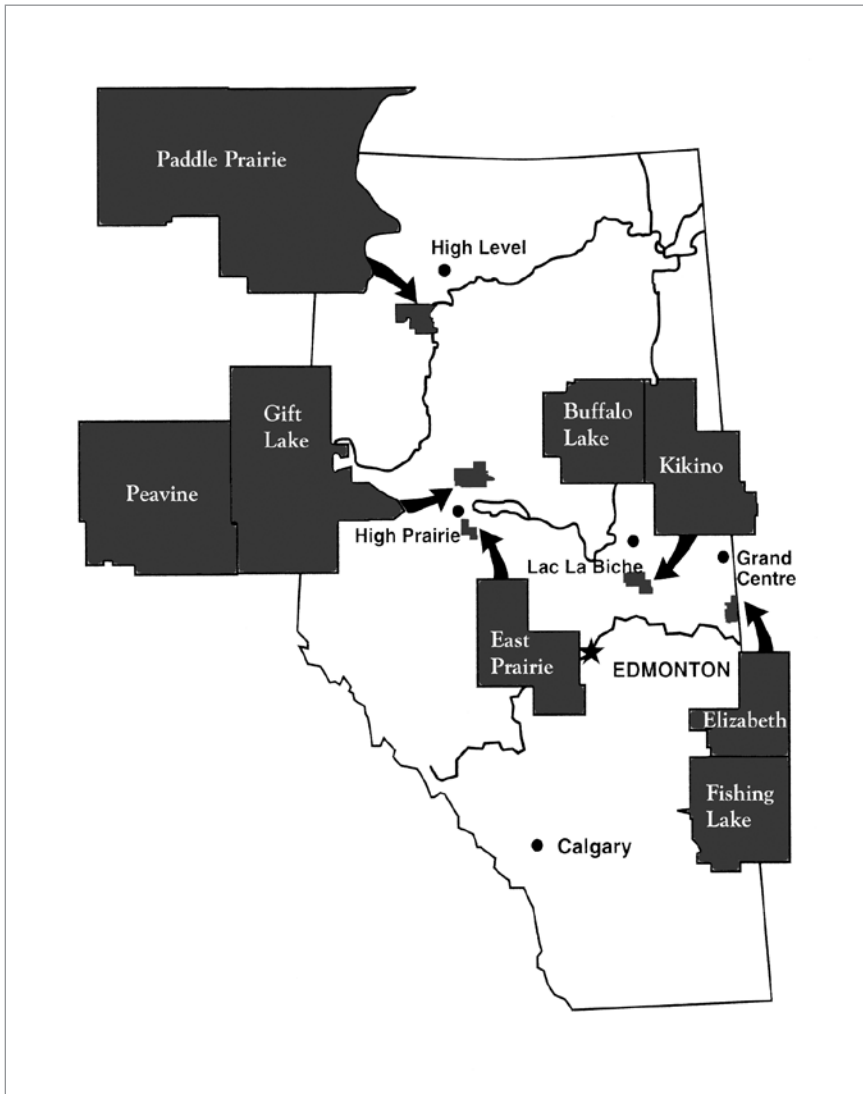


FIG. 1. MAP OF THE ALBERTA MÉTIS SETTLEMENTS. | COURTESY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA.

the monumental promise this event held for these communities.

Yet, the meaningful expression of a culture through the built environment has always been multifaceted and this holds especially true for Métis people in Canada given their complex emergence as a fusion between First Nations and European peoples during the fur trade,⁹ and their subsequent evolution into a distinct nation composed of multiple subcultures.¹⁰ Symbols such as the Métis flag and sash, the Red River Cart, the birchbark canoe, and Michif language, have all become synonymous with the distinct identity of Métis people across the country.¹¹ Métis artistic and cultural expression have also been celebrated in terms of traditional weaving, beadwork, music, clothing, and the design of other objects, etc.¹² Authors, amongst others Maria Campbell, Margo Kane, and Joseph Boyden, have similarly brought Métis perspectives into a national literary consciousness. Yet, despite two of Canada's most accomplished and prolific architects being recognized as Métis,¹³ rarely has architectural design been considered as meaningful.¹⁴ This is arguably due to popular perceptions of "architecture" being inclusive only to those projects stamped by professionals despite the long-standing positions of scholars like Henry Glassie who asserts that "there are no differences among kinds of building. All are cultural creations, orderings of experience, like poems and rituals."¹⁵ If "folk" and "vernacular" are rightfully accepted as such valuable cultural contributors, then all buildings and structures within the relatively new boundaries of the Alberta settlements provide significant opportunities to consider their cultural impact through their design, fabrication, construction, and inhabitation.

Before discussing more specifically the buildings and structures, however, it is

essential to recognize that although the settlement boundaries exist as physical lines in space, they are more lucidly experienced in the psyche, as invisible and permeable membranes, punctured by a multitude of physical and social exchanges that negate any futile attempt to define a Métis "style." Instead, the material and immaterial exchanges within, through, and between these boundaries illustrate the complex relationship between the settlement buildings and the people who designed, built, and use them. In order to clarify these material and cultural intricacies, this essay will start with a very brief introduction to assemblage theory.

ASSEMBLAGE THEORY AND THE ALBERTA SETTLEMENTS

To view societies as assemblages is to study them in terms of the myriad relationships between the individual components of the overriding network or system, including internal and external interactions. Manuel Delanda argues that the concept of assemblage is defined based on two perspectives, both relevant to the present discussion. The first one defines the various roles that components can play in a system, ranging from purely material to purely expressive. For example, there are a range of material components, "from food and physical labour, to simple tools and complex machines, to the buildings and neighbourhoods serving as their physical locales."¹⁶ As for expressive roles, they can be phenomena such as shared postures, languages and dialects, behaviours, social norms, and taboos.

The second dimension Delanda discusses is the degree to which the processes and interactions of the components stabilize the assemblage by increasing its internal homogeneity, or the opposite, destabilize it by increasing its heterogeneity. Here, using Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's

terms of territorialization and deterritorialization, Delanda writes:

[P]rocesses of territorialization are processes that define or sharpen the spatial boundaries of actual territories. Territorialization, on the other hand, also refers to non-spatial processes which increase the internal homogeneity of an assemblage, such as the sorting processes which exclude a certain category of people from membership of an organization, or the segregation processes which increase the ethnic or racial homogeneity of a neighbourhood. Any process which either destabilizes spatial boundaries or increases internal heterogeneity is considered deterritorializing. A good example is technology, ranging from writing and a reliable postal service to telegraphs, telephones and computers, all of which blur the spatial boundaries of social entities by eliminating the need for co-presence . . .¹⁷

As regards the Alberta Settlements, there were a series of significant territorializing events leading up to the government's recognition of the territories through cartography, including the convergence of Métis solidarity and the organized political will in the region.¹⁸ Every social, political, and physical development from that point onward can be viewed as either further territorializing or deterritorializing these initial developments. For instance, the criteria set for membership and land acquisition in the settlements and the introduction of distinctly Métis topics into school curricula are two primary territorializing forces, while the improvement of the roads and the introduction of the Internet could be seen as deterritorializing. Even though there have been numerous other significant events and actions along these lines, this essay focuses on the built environment and its impact on Métis sense of place and identity in the settlements, using these guiding terms.



FIG. 2. EXAMPLE OF AN EARLY LOG HOME WITH SOD ROOF, PADDLE PRAIRIE SETTLEMENT (FORMERLY KEG RIVER). | GLENBOW MUSEUM ARCHIVES.

TERRITORIALIZATION THROUGH CONSTRUCTION

When the first Métis families arrived at the settlements during the 1930s and 1940s, they were faced with a scenario similar to that of homesteaders throughout North America for centuries. With few resources and an allocated piece of land, they erected their homes and community buildings using only basic tools and the materials readily available. This initial construction phase, however, was not the very first permanently built Métis community in the province or on these specific territories. For example, Buffalo Lake had previously been one of the most significant Métis *hivernant* (wintering) camps in the Canadian Northwest where, in the nineteenth century, as many as one hundred and sixty log cabins had been built for families during the hunting months. But these cabins had been fabricated hastily and not much information exists regarding their construction to compare to the mid-twentieth-century settlements.¹⁹ St. Paul



FIG. 3. JACK LYNIS RESIDENCE, KIKINO SETTLEMENT. | DAVID T. FORTIN.

des Métis (1896-1909) is recognized as the first distinctly Métis community in Alberta, yet it was a Catholic missionary colony modeled after the Paraguayan *Reducciones* of the sixteenth century and its architecture largely reflects this hackneyed narrative more than that of the Métis people who actually lived there.²⁰ Furthermore, recent field research suggests that there is very little to no evidence on the settlements of what is often described as a Métis vernacular, the Red River system of corner posts with vertical grooves in which to stack logs,²¹ even though various accounts demonstrate that it was used in other Alberta Métis communities, such as the Father Lacombe Chapel built in 1861, and at the Victoria Mission during the same era.²²

Like their ancestors in Manitoba and throughout the Prairies,²³ the early homes of the Alberta settlements typically used rough or hewn logs with some kind of corner notching, often a dovetail joint, and had basic floor plans consisting of one or two rooms. A historical account

of Kikino highlights this early *in situ* construction.

The first people to arrive in Kikino were faced with building a new home and community on the open prairie that surrounded Lone Pine Lake. Trees had to be cut, hauled, and sawn. Homes were built using logs, flattened on two sides and shingles cut from spruce. A school was built by the new residents. The land was broken, stumps were removed with teams of horses, and the rocks were picked. It was an immense task and there were few power tools to make the job easier. Much of the work was done with an axe, hammer, and swede saw.²⁴

Adrian Hope, a renowned former president of the Métis Association of Alberta from Kikino, similarly recalls building his log home:

I pulled up by Whitefish Lake up here and I seen some great big trees of dried poplar. And I thought that will make a house . . . I hauled them down, four each day, hewed them and put them in their place. When I

had nine, by God, I had them high as this wall . . . nine big logs. But I had to get some slabs or something to put on top for a roof . . . I went to the old sawmill and picked out my slabs. Slabs on top; trimmed them up a little bit. Then I went and made hay. I came home with a big load of hay and I put half the load on top of my roof. Ani started digging dirt and put dirt on top. Finally I had it all covered. That fall I plastered the outside. I had a little cook stove in there. No Floor!²⁵

These kinds of accounts remain vivid in the memory and identity of the Métis communities today, as evidenced during a series of interviews conducted in 2014 for this research. Glen Auger, an elder from Buffalo Lake, remembers the log home he was raised in as well as the community school, both of which were built with simple axes and saws. The elders coordinator at Gift Lake Settlement, Dale Laderoute, says that historically, “everyone lived in log homes,” and that the community worked together to build them. At Peavine Settlement, Sheila Knipp, granddaughter of local Métis leader Alcide Beaudry, proudly tours the small log store that her mother built, while at Elizabeth Settlement, Public Works Director Rick Blyan fondly recalls the mostly vanished log hunting cabins that used only the “basic local materials.”

Timber construction, however, is not strictly a historical phenomenon in the settlements. Jack Lynis, a Kikino resident and builder, left to work temporarily in the lucrative Alberta oil fields during the mid-1980s before deciding to return and build a log home in the settlement. Lynis learned techniques through self-directed research and has since gained a reputation, offering courses to other settlements and completing a shelter at the Lac La Biche Golf Club, where, in the spirit of Adrian Hope, he hewed all the



FIG. 4. EXTERIOR OF MUSKEG HOME, EAST PRAIRIE SETTLEMENT. | DAVID T. FORTIN.



FIG. 5. ENTRY OF MUSKEG HOME, EAST PRAIRIE SETTLEMENT. | DAVID T. FORTIN.

structural members with only his chain-saw. Similarly, a resident of East Prairie Settlement gave up his “new” home to return to what Public Works coordinator John Supernault refers to as “the old ways.” He chose a site on the edge of a remote section of muskeg to build an off-grid two-storey home that combines contrasting approaches to material and

construction and results in an exclusive architectural composition. The interior of this “muskeg home” exhibits rustic elements (*i.e.*, rough timber posts, wood burning stove, hunting rifle, traditional medicines hung to dry) and manufactured ones (corrugated plastic panels, coloured skylights, prefabricated doors and framing connectors—even a Marcel Breuer



FIG. 6. INTERIOR OF MUSKEG HOME, EAST PRAIRIE SETTLEMENT. | DAVID T. FORTIN.



FIG. 7. EARLY FOOTBRIDGE, EAST PRAIRIE SETTLEMENT. | GLENBOW MUSEUM ARCHIVES.

Cesca-inspired chair). Additionally, the exterior combines twelve feet by twelve feet hewn log construction and a lean-to for a sweat lodge, with conventional wood framing, commercial OSB sheathing, store-bought wood lattice, and spray foam insulation to replace traditional chinking. Although the details are rudimentary and *ad hoc*, the home is unique in its conscious combination of traditional and Western construction and material approaches.

Other projects on the settlements likewise demonstrate an ongoing appreciation for humble construction typologies that directly reflect the Métis people's lifestyle. For example, archival photos document a minimalist wood pedestrian bridge that existed at East Prairie Settlement to improve mobility for the residents. More recently, timber structures have been erected for hunting, livestock shelter, and for the smoking and/or drying of buffalo and fish meat, for instance. The campground at Kikino features cabins built by Lynis and a log-built store and office. These modest structures demonstrate subtle variations responding both to site and personal preference, and most often use a combination of store-bought and repurposed materials.

The prominence of such log construction on the settlements, which could easily be misconstrued as nostalgic, transcends the symbolic and instead forms an essential link between the residents and their cherished homeland akin to Christian Norberg-Schultz's influential writings on the *genius loci* during the 1980s. One might see the various Métis builders as archetypal of his central thesis: "To gain an existential foothold man has to know where he is. But he also has to identify

himself with the environment, that is, he has to know how he is a certain place."²⁶

The act of building in one's homeland with materials directly from it, using only one's hands and basic tools, similarly embodies the traditions of the indigenous Métis ancestors whose construction techniques, Juhani Pallasmaa argues, "[are] guided by the body in the same way that a bird shapes its nest by movements of its body."²⁷ In many cases, as in the examples mentioned above, it is the yearning for a reconnection with the landscape and an architecture that meaningfully reflects this relationship that leads to the choice of material and construction, and if one stitches together the collection of log-built cabins and homes, hunting shacks, smoke structures, and wood-sided buildings, it becomes apparent that there is an undeniable homogenizing aspect to the role that wood has played as a territorializing material component in the history of the Alberta settlements. The folklore and imagination of the nostalgic log cabin persist, but this image has evolved into a more complex, but crucial link between the residents, their lifestyles, and their lands.

DETERRITORIALIZATION THROUGH FABRICATION

As evident as the homogenizing log structures in the Alberta settlements are, however, there are equally apparent deterritorializing aspects of the built environment. In terms of factors increasing the heterogeneity of the settlements, it is essential to first note the significant increase in accessibility over the last half-century. Compared to the initial conditions that discouraged travel and communication (lack of roads and electricity, for instance), most of the settlements are now only a short drive away from neighbouring towns and have digital technologies comparable to those of any



FIG. 8. MEAT-SMOKING AND DRYING STRUCTURES, ELIZABETH SETTLEMENT. | DAVID T. FORTIN.



FIG. 9. MEAT-SMOKING STRUCTURE, EAST PRAIRIE SETTLEMENT. | DAVID T. FORTIN.

community. This has resulted in increased immaterial (Internet) and material (including conventional building materials) exchanges with outside communities and the ensuing inevitable cultural influences. As one Elizabeth Settlement elder summarizes, “Most of our young people are influenced by the technology available to them . . . and we’re so close to the city, it’s taking away our ways.”²⁸

The impacts of these deterritorializing factors are clearly reflected in the built environment of the settlements, including predictable issues linked to affordability and subsidized housing programs. For example, a Housing Committee of the Alberta Métis Association prepared in 1973 a document intended to “illustrate the basic concept in house design that is desired by Métis and Indian families.”²⁹ The publication comprised basic floor plans and front elevations for two “frame built” homes with vertical siding, three log homes, and one “half-log” home. Yet, while one of the requests of the committee was to provide for “adaptability to [construct] in remote areas with local materials,” it also made clear that “conventional homebuilder’s house designs were reviewed and found to be acceptable,” as well as the idea of “factory assembly.”³⁰ It further noted that exterior materials be selected to “minimize maintenance.”

This short document adequately highlights some of the major issues influencing the housing developments on the settlements through the various government-subsidized programs. While there remains the desire for log construction, there is also an acceptance of “conventional” prefabricated housing, which provided settlement residents the opportunity to live in a house

that not only met the *Canadian Building Code for Residential Construction*, but also the lifestyle standards of families in nearby non-Aboriginal communities. In all of the six settlements visited during fieldwork, the process for residential construction has typically involved the government establishing the cost for a single-family home and the settlement administration then requesting contract bids from off-settlement companies. Residents are then presented with a few floor plans to choose from as well as items such as paint colour, cabinet options, and occasionally minor adjustments to the plans. As Elizabeth Settlement elder Archie Collins notes, however, there was never any perceived agency when it came to design: “You get a home. You get a package. You get a dollar amount that you are going to spend on that home and the building codes dictates on how that building is built and what kind of insulation, what kind of vapour barrier, and the vents and everything.”³¹

With a few exceptions, this has been the experience for the vast majority of residents on the settlements. Despite the options presented by the Housing Committee, Buffalo Lake infrastructure manager Bruce Gordon recalls that he originally requested a log home but was told that it was not an option. Gordon argues that many residents would have preferred a log home if possible:

We’re kind of stuck with materials that you can get out of the yard. The lumber yard . . . I know a lot of people don’t like the vinyl siding and they’d rather even go to stucco or something different . . . I’ve heard people talk . . . they’d rather have a log home rather than this type of thing. Because . . . I don’t even think they find these homes as warm or comfortable, they want a sense of feeling at home. It’s just a structure that they’re living in.³²



FIG. 10. THE PROMINENCE OF LOG CONSTRUCTION AND WOOD SIDING THROUGHOUT THE SETTLEMENTS HAS A DEFINITIVE TERRITORIALIZING EFFECT. | DAVID T. FORTIN.

Gordon's comments elucidate the inherent disconnect between dweller and dwelling in terms of the prefabricated home. According to Pierre Frey, the idea of prefabrication and emphasis on rationalization is antithetical to the idea of *genius loci*. He writes:

[T]he construction industry, by rationalizing and optimizing its processes, at one and the same time renders them uniform and causes a massive displacement of the centres of decision-making. By the end of those processes, the building site can no longer be described as the place where the building is produced. It is merely the place where components designed and built elsewhere are assembled.³³

The essence of fabrication is revealed in its definition—which is “to invent” or “create,” “to make up for the purpose of deception,” or “to construct from

diverse and usually standardized parts.”³⁴ For Frey, the result of such an endeavour when it comes to building, is a sense of alienation. He argues that in

constructing a home, a school, a market or some other community amenity—in short any building that answers a social need . . . the standards set by manufacturers or by legislative or regulatory requirements produce perverse side effects. Then it is not only the worker on the site who is alienated but the end user too.³⁵

The majority of houses on the Alberta settlements exhibit this kind of detachment between landscape and artefact. Despite the recommendations for log homes by the Housing Committee in 1973 and a subsequent report in 1975 on housing for teachers living in the settlements that argued mobile homes “have a sort of built-in psychological effect of

impermanence” and that log exteriors “have been suggested,”³⁶ another housing study in 1977 concluded that “the Emergency Trailer Program is the only program providing new additional housing stock to the settlements.”³⁷ While the quality of construction has drastically improved since the trailer era, the subsidized housing existing on the settlements (including the early catalogue houses, various mobile homes, and even recent projects by Habitat for Humanity) remains indistinguishable from communities outside of the settlements.

This cultural and environmental disconnect often extends beyond residential construction as well. A stark example of this in terms of community structures, many of which are assembled from pre-ordered industrial steel building packages, is the Buffalo Lake Recreation Centre described by Bruce Gordon: “Our gymnasium that was built, [it was] built to code. But we wanted [people] to know that, basically, you’re in a Métis community when you come into it so we had kids at Caslan school [do] the big mural.”³⁸

The necessity for the mural reflects the complete disconnect between the original building and any sense of Métis identity and reaffirms Norberg-Schultz’s convincing assertion that “[to] make practical towns and buildings is not enough.”³⁹

RETERRITORIALIZATION THROUGH DESIGN

While the above examples succinctly illustrate the familiar debate between *in situ* and prefabrication processes in terms of territorialization and deterritorialization (or the persistent tensions between indigenous and modern ideologies through design), it is necessary to also acknowledge other developments impacting the relationship between Métis



FIG. 11. TYPICAL HOUSING, ELIZABETH SETTLEMENT (LEFT TO RIGHT: MOBILE HOME, MANUFACTURED HOUSING, AND NEW HOUSING PROJECT WITH HABITAT FOR HUMANITY). | DAVID T. FORTIN.



FIG. 12. BUFFALO LAKE SETTLEMENT RECREATION CENTRE. | DAVID T. FORTIN.

Another prominent example of an architectural pursuit of Métis-specific design is Kikino Elementary School, which won a Canadian Architect Award of Excellence in 1986. Designed by Japanese architect Yoshi Natsuyama, then of Koliger Schmidt Architect-Engineer, the conceptual design emerged from Natsuyama’s research into Métis culture and his camping at the site during two separate visits to better understand the community and the place. While the juror comments in the publication on the successful massing of the building (creating a welcoming village effect) and its appropriate use of “visual and cultural objectives” (which include the colours and patterns of selected Métis art, and formal references to the churches in the settlement),⁴⁴ it is Natsuyama’s personal investment in the project that reveals some of its more subtle contributions. Partner Bruce Koliger recalls that Natsuyama camped out in order to “sense the air and feel the ground,” an approach to design that the designer expands on.

When I camped at the proposed site in [the] woods, before [beginning] design work, I felt the breezy wind along the slope of [the] woods. Probably the wind was breezing there before the hamlet was started, or even before the Caucasian and Native came there. The same wind was there since hundreds or thousands [of] years . . . If one could perceive the passage of time as this and could see oneself by this kind of mind,

identity and architecture on the settlements. If the previous territorialization processes can be summarized as *in situ* design-build projects executed largely by settlement residents, and the deterritorialization processes are conversely considered as designed and often prefabricated from outside of settlement boundaries, then a second form of territorialization, or reterritorialization, might be considered through the design of structures intended to reflect and cultivate Métis culture and identity, but from beyond the boundary.

While not personally identifying with any particular Métis community or culture,⁴⁰ Alberta-born Aboriginal architect Douglas Cardinal worked extensively with Métis communities in Alberta

during the 1970s, most notably a rehabilitation centre in Bonnyville, a school in Paddle Prairie Settlement, and a housing prototype for Grouard (near Peavine Settlement).⁴¹ According to Trevor Boddy, the design of the rehabilitation centre aimed to be a “self-reliant community stressing traditional land-based lifestyles as an aid to recovery,” and prioritized basic construction in order to employ local Métis and First Nations community members to build it.⁴² The Grouard housing project similarly used stackwall construction to allow for smaller poplars and other trees too small for log construction to be used. In both cases wood is again foregrounded, however its application transcends aesthetics to consider constructability and issues related to material availability and labour.⁴³

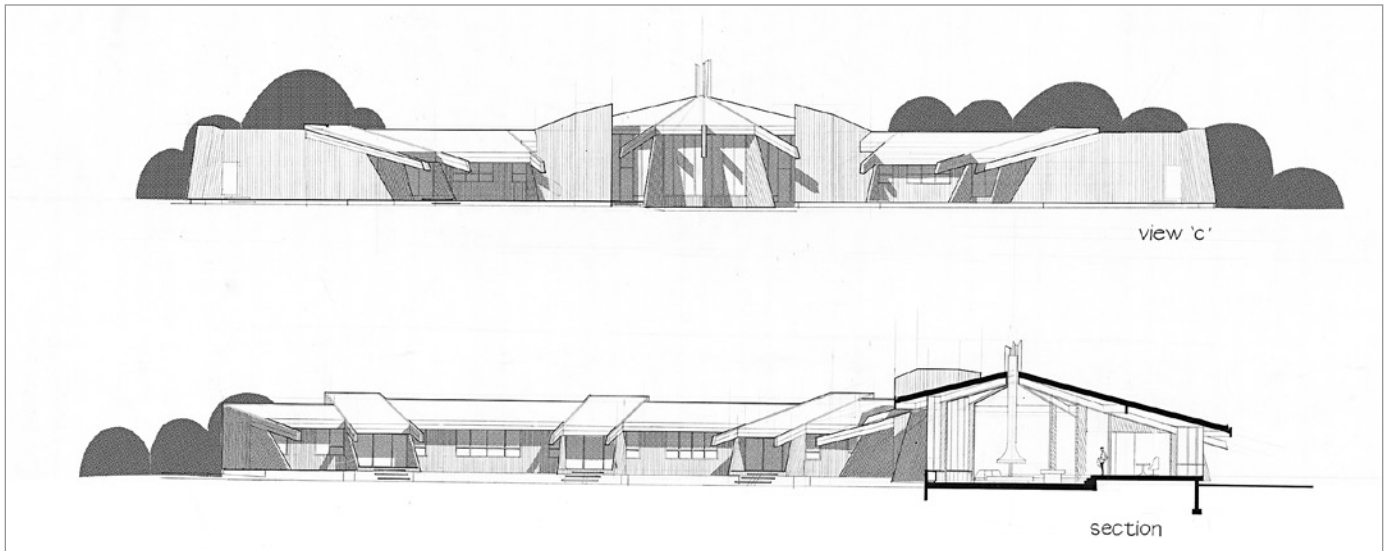


FIG. 13. ELEVATION AND SECTION OF BONNYVILLE REHABILITATION CENTRE BY DOUGLAS CARDINAL. | CANADIAN ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES.

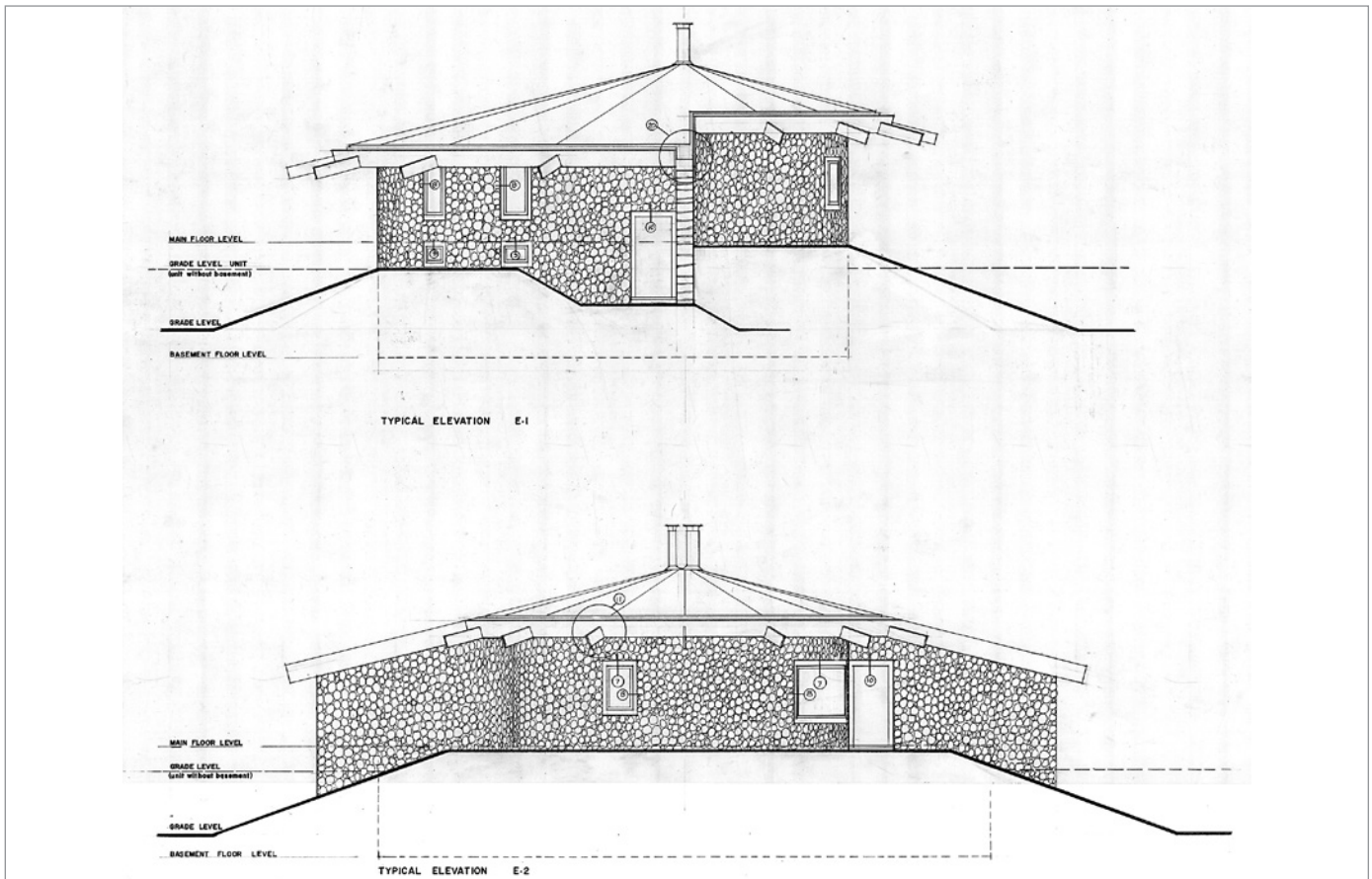


FIG. 14. ELEVATIONS OF GROUARD HOUSING PROJECT BY DOUGLAS CARDINAL, USING STACKWALL CONSTRUCTION. | CANADIAN ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES.



FIG. 15. INSPIRATIONAL PHOTOS OF SITE TAKEN BY ARCHITECT. | PHOTOS COURTESY OF YOSHI NATSUYAMA.



FIG. 16. SMALL WIND TURBINES AND SETTLEMENT LOGO, KIKINO SCHOOL. | DAVID T. FORTIN.

These examples highlight an essential aspect of territorialization related to the Alberta settlements. One of the inherent characteristics of assemblages is the vital connection to components outside of the territory. If the discussion ended with only the dichotomous relationship between *in situ* and prefabricated processes, an overly simplified conclusion would state that locally built timber construction is the only territorializing factor impacting what might be perceived as distinctly Métis design on the Settlements. But, as David Kolb reminds us, such simplification is never sufficient:

[A] frequent problem with places today is the replacement of complex interwoven identities and places by series of simpler identities and places . . . more complex places can support a richer and more self-aware inhabitation that embodies more fully and explicitly the conditions and processes that make places possible at all.⁴⁷

As Delanda did, he further adds that complex places acknowledge their multiple roles and forces, as well as their external links to other places and the multiple processes that bring them together. In this way, Kikino School forged new

the sadness or anger might be changed . . . to [a] different stage.⁴⁵

The design of Kikino School thus strives to strengthen Métis culture and identity through its visual cues and massing, but also through the modest wind turbines atop the towers, providing an ethereal

link between the presence of the place and the community itself. It is clear that, despite being foreign to the site and the community, Natsuyama unveiled aspects about Métis culture that resonated with the community and set a new standard for subsequent schools in other Métis communities.⁴⁶

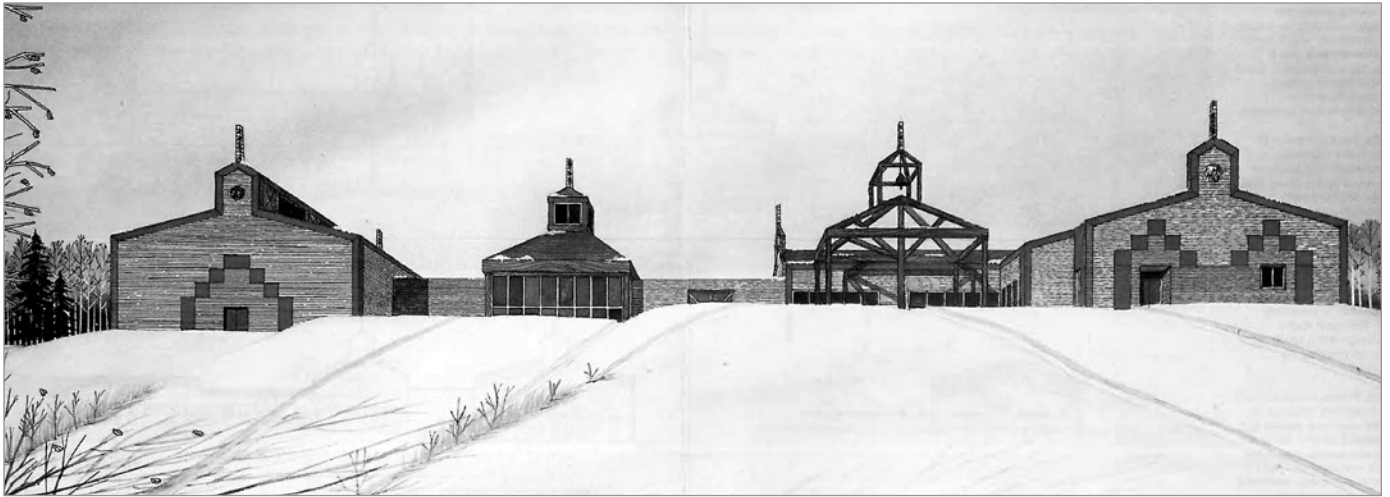


FIG. 17. KIKINO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, DESIGNED BY KOLIGER SCHMIDT ARCHITECT-ENGINEER; RENDERING BY CESAR USON. | IMAGE COURTESY OF KOLIGER SCHMIDT ARCHITECT-ENGINEER.

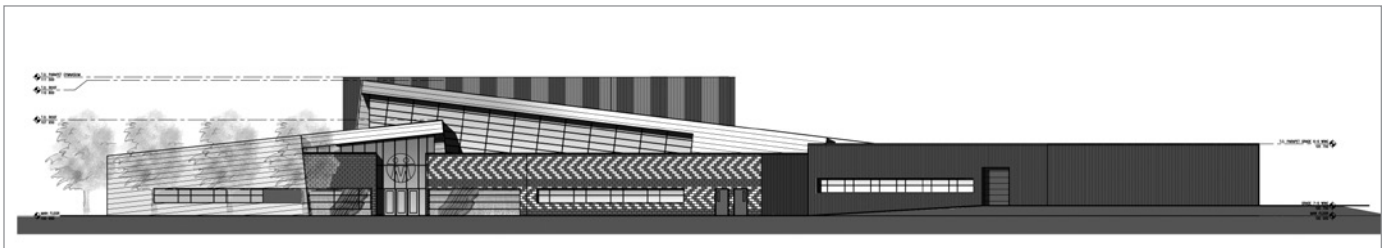


FIG. 18. ELEVATION OF GIFT LAKE REPLACEMENT SCHOOL, NORTHERN LAKES COLLEGE, DAYCARE, AND HEADSTART COMPLEX, ILLUSTRATING MASONRY AND FENESTRATION DESIGNS REFLECTING THE MÉTIS SASH AS WELL AS THE INCLUSION OF THE SETTLEMENT LOGO. DESIGNED BY GROUP2 ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN. | IMAGE COURTESY OF GROUP2.

territory in considering what a distinctly Métis contemporary design process might involve and this line of pursuit has continued in other projects, such as a new education and community facility in Gift Lake Settlement, designed by Group2 Architecture and Interior Design. Here, the design team led community consultation sessions and “design charrettes” that formed a vision for the project that aimed to reflect the community’s needs and desires.

Describing one aspect of this design process, school principal Barb Laderoute expressed her pride in the specific choices for colours used in the school:

The colours chosen are from the Métis sash. The colour variations include: red,

which is the historical depicted colour for the Métis sash; blue and white, symbolizing the colours of the Métis Nation flag; green, signifying fertility, growth and prosperity; and black, symbolizing the dark period in which the Métis people had to endure dispossession and repression.⁴⁸

To what level the building user will comprehend the symbology of the colours is debatable, but it is revealing that great lengths were taken to search for the identity of the Gift Lake Métis through the decision-making process regarding design. Like at Kikino School, the designers were not from the settlement but worked with the community to identify the most pertinent aspects of their culture that could be somehow translated into architecture.

CONCLUSION - MÉTIS AS RHIZOME

If the Alberta settlements can be considered using the above terms, we recognize their unique place not only in Canadian history, but also in discussions about Canadian design thinking. A final conceptual leap thus summarizes the architectural relevance of the settlements in Alberta—their assemblage as rhizome. The rhizome, a key metaphor used by Deleuze and Guattari, considers complex assemblages to be in a constant state of becoming, or presencing, as in the opening Heidegger quote. The rhizome is especially useful in considering the Métis in Alberta related to the multiple geographical locations of the Settlements, as well as the syncretic nature of the Métis in Canadian history:

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo . . . The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without a beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle.⁴⁹

Métis culture originated between European and First Nations lineages, both genetically and ideologically, but it cannot be considered simply as a fusion of the two. The Métis settlers in Alberta followed generations of liminal movement across the Canadian Prairies without ever having a single point of origin. Although Red River is recognized as the location where the Métis “nation” emerged, Métis people have always been inherently linked to both indigenous and foreign perspectives and thus their “origin” as an Aboriginal people is convoluted. As Julia Harrison writes, quoting twentieth-century Métis leader Stan Daniels,

the Métis have found themselves “caught in the vacuum of two cultures with neither fully accepting [them].” The marginality of the Métis—who have not been given either the resources and rights of Indians or full access to white society and its advantages—has created an almost negative identity: “they are Métis because they are not somebody else.”⁵⁰

And yet, while still negotiating this marginality, the Métis have arguably embraced their “between-status,” as evidenced in the 1979 Declaration of Métis

Rights that states they are “the true spirit of Canada and . . . the source of Canadian identity.”⁵¹

It would be reductive, therefore, to try to discuss the architecture and material culture of the Alberta settlements only in their relation to Red River or the image of the nostalgic log cabin. Similarly, it would be naive to omit the influence of the pre-fabricated buildings or various churches that directly link the settlements to their neighbouring communities and their storied pasts. And while it could be argued that the Koliger Schmidt and Group2 design teams, like the various other firms who have created administrative and educational buildings on the settlements with varying levels of success, deterritorialized the settlements by bringing in their “outside” approaches, the effect of the design process in these cases has reterritorialized an evolving sense of identity and culture within the settlements. Thus, as long as there is a recognition of, and an active discussion between, the territorializing, deterritorializing, and subsequent reterritorializing processes of the built environment on the settlements, the assemblage of buildings will continue playing their role in providing an infinite becoming of a nation eternally between, and a confirmation that, as Louis Riel predicted, his “people will sleep for 100 years, and when they awake, it will be the artists who give them back their spirit.”⁵² Every meat-smoking structure, animal shelter, self-built home, renovation, and addition, clearly exhibit this spirit and when these are considered in discussion with those community buildings that specifically pursue what a “Métis architecture” is, or what it should be, they collectively confirm that approaches to architectural

design and material culture on the Alberta settlements are as unique in their evolution as the people who live there.

NOTES

1. This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
2. Heidegger, Martin, 1993, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in *Basic Writings*, New York, Routledge, p. 343-364, at p. 356.
3. Ghostkeeper, Elmer, 1981, “‘Our Land and Our Culture Is Our Future,’ Strategies and Implications of Development on the Métis Settlements of Alberta,” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 151-157, at p. 152.
4. O’Byrne, Nicole, 2013, “‘No Other Weapon Except Organization’: The Métis Association of Alberta and the 1938 Métis Population Betterment Act,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, vol. 24, no. 2, p. 311-352, at p. 323.
5. Harrison, Julia, 1985, *Métis: People Between Two Worlds*, Vancouver, Glenbow-Alberta Institute, p. 96.
6. O’Byrne : 323.
7. There were a significant number of buildings erected in the wintering camps of Buffalo Lake during the 1800s, yet most of them were destroyed. See Doll, Marcel F.V., Robert S. Kidd and John P. Day, 1988, *The Buffalo Lake Métis Site: A Late Nineteenth Century Settlement in the Parkland of Central Alberta*, Edmonton, Provincial Museum of Alberta.
8. Jung, Carl G., 1933, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, New York, Harcourt, p. 201.
9. See Sealey, D. Bruce and Antoine S, Lussier, 1975, *The Métis: Canada’s Forgotten People*, Winnipeg, Manitoba Métis Federation Press.
10. See Foster, John E., 2007, “The Métis: The People and the Term,” in Patrick C. Douaud (ed.), *The Western Métis: Profile of a People*, Regina, Canadian Plains Research Centre.
11. See Goulet, George and Terry Goulet, 2006, *The Métis: Memorable Events and Memorable Personalities*, Calgary, FabJob, p. 27-47.

12. See Barkwell, Lawrie, Leah M. Dorion and Audreen Hourie, 2006, *Métis Legacy Volume II: Michif Culture, Heritage, and Folkways*, Saskatoon, Gabriel Dumont Institute.
13. Douglas Cardinal and Étienne Gaboury.
14. There have been multiple descriptions of historic Métis housing and construction methodology. This will be discussed in detail in future aspects of this research project, but this essay will focus on the context of the settlements in Alberta. For a basic description of Métis housing, see for example Barkwell *et al.*, 2006 : 66-69.
15. Glassie, Henry, 1999, *Material Culture*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, p. 227.
16. Delanda, Manuel, 2006, *A New Philosophy of Society*, New York, Continuum, p. 12.
17. *Id.* : 13.
18. Leadership was key to the organization of the Métis in their pursuit of a land base, including men such as Jim Brady, Malcolm Norris, Pete Tomkins, and Joe Dion. Brady was an intellectual socialist highly influenced by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. See Harrison : 97. See also, The Métis Association of Alberta, Joe Sawchuk, Patricia Sawchuk and Theresa Ferguson, 1981, *Métis Land Rights in Alberta: A Political History*, Edmonton, Métis Association of Alberta, p. 187-212.
19. Doll *et al.* : 211.
20. The Métis Association of Alberta *et al.* : 6, 159-185.
21. "In Canada a method known as the Red River system was developed. Squared posts had either a channel rebated in them or flanges attached on either side, which took the ends of squared logs dropped into them." Oliver, Paul, 2003, *Dwellings*, New York, Phaidon, p. 114. As David Burley and Gayel A. Horsfall (1989, "Vernacular Houses and Farmsteads of the Canadian Métis," *Journal of Cultural Geography*, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 25) note, however, this system was imported from Francophone communities along the St. Lawrence River.
22. See Kalman, Harold, 1994, *History of Canadian Architecture: Volume 1*, Don Mills, ON, Oxford, p. 339-341.
23. See Barkwell *et al.*, 2006 : 66-69.
24. Miller, Bill (ed.), 1984, *Our Home: A History of Kikino Métis Settlement*, Edmonton, Alberta Federation of Métis Settlements, p. vi.
25. *Id.* : 28.
26. Norberg-Shultz, Christian, 1984, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, New York, Rizzoli, p. 19.
27. Pallasmaa, Juhani, 2005, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, Sussex, Wiley and Sons, p. 26.
28. Personal interview, August 6, 2014, Elizabeth Settlement.
29. Alberta Métis Association, 1973, *House Designs for the Alberta Métis Association*, Edmonton, Alberta Métis Association, p. 2.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Personal interview, August 6, 2014, Elizabeth Settlement.
32. Personal interview, August 8, 2014, Buffalo Lake Settlement.
33. Frey, Pierre, 2013, *Learning from Vernacular: Towards a New Vernacular Architecture*, Tours, Actes Sud, p. 29.
34. "Fabricate," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, [<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fabricate>], accessed May 2, 2015.
35. Frey : 32.
36. Swift, W.H., 1975, *Report of the Northland School Division Study Group*, Edmonton, Alberta Department of Education, p. 98.
37. St. Germain, Sandra and Dale Bairstow, 1977, *Métis Settlement Housing Study, July-August 1977*, Edmonton, Department of Housing and Public Works, Policy and Program Development Branch, p. 29.
38. Personal interview, August 8, 2014, Buffalo Lake Settlement.
39. Norberg-Shultz : 23.
40. Personal interview, October 14, 2014, Ottawa, ON.
41. Trevor Boddy (1989, *The Architecture of Douglas Cardinal*, Edmonton, NeWest, p. 75) describes the project as being for the Grouard Métis Settlement; however, there is no Grouard Métis settlement. It is possible that this was designed for the nearby Peavine settlement or Métis people living in or near Grouard.
42. Boddy : 72.
43. *Id.* : 75. This is especially relevant to places like Peavine where smaller poplars are common due to geographical features and a recent logging program that has seen many residents sell their larger trees.
44. "Award of Excellence: Kikino Elementary School, Kikino, Alberta," 1986, *Canadian Architect*, vol. 31, no. 12, December, p. 12-15.
45. Personal email, March 8, 2015.
46. According to Kikino Chairman Floyd Thompson. Phone interview, August 6, 2014.
47. Kolb, David, 2008, *Sprawling Places*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, p. 53.
48. Clegg, Chris, 2013, "Construction To Begin Immediately: Gift Lake Learning Centre Sod Turning Ceremony," *South Peace News*, [<http://www.southpeacenews.com/news-desk/volume51/130508/news2.html>], accessed February 3, 2015.
49. Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, 1987, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, New York, Continuum, p. 25.
50. Harrison : 15.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Quoted in Barkwell, Lawrie, Leah M. Dorrian and Darren Préfontaine, 2001, *Métis Legacy: A Métis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography, Volume 1*, Winnipeg, Pemmican, p. 189.