

The Zerfred Grapevine

Wilhelmina C. Fredericks (a 'Métis' of South Africa)



About Wilhelmina

By South African Women for Women (Canada)

Born in South Africa and having lived in Canada since the early sixties, Wilhelmina Fredericks has a personality that is larger than life. She has earned the Queens Golden Jubilee medal, the Y of Quebec Peace Medal and recognition from the South African Government, for her contribution to the people in their country

Wilhelmina had visited the New Hope Center in Worcester, South Africa to find that 25 mute and hearing-impaired children were expected to share one computer. True to her personality, she lobbied various companies and was given 50 computers, printers, fax machines and telephones, secured free shipping for the equipment and collected used clothing and educational books for the school.

Not content with having achieved this, she formed Zerf Productions in Montreal and Worcester, South Africa, so the Métis of South Africa can find their own identity like she did in Canada.

Wilhelmina is a respected sociologist, dialogue coach, director and producer, who graduated from Concordia University in Montreal.

Having traveled widely, Wilhelmina has immersed herself in many cultures and communities and even in her home town of Montreal. She spends many hours helping those less fortunate, collecting clothes and food.

Whether in her neighborhood or several thousand miles away, her profound sense of giving back to the community drives her to help those who can benefit from her zeal and drive. Wilhelmina is presently working with children infected and affected with HIV and AIDS In Canada South Africa, Tanzania.

Google 'Zerf Productions' and 'Wilhelmina Fredericks'

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The *Zerfred Grapevine*: Identity and Verification

The *Zerfred Grapevine* identifies and verifies the striking similarities between the Métis of South Africa and Canada from a historical and cultural perspective. The title is a combination of the family names Zerf and Fredericks exemplifying the birth of the South African Métis. We have exhibited the half hour presentation in seven countries and recorded the dialogue in French, English, Afrikaans, Dutch, German, Spanish, and Japanese at Concordia University in Montreal.

Historians, anthropologists, and sociologists dealing with race relations have delved into evidence about the indigenous peoples of both countries, but almost all have ignored the Métis populations. To my knowledge, no comparisons of the Métis in Canada and South Africa have ever been exhibited or illustrated. I have therefore addressed this neglect through a slide presentation.

Despite the lack of attention, Canadian and South African Métis share striking historical and cultural links and similarities. The most obvious of these is the shared experience of European colonization. The Métis are the forgotten offspring of colonization; they sprang from indigenous population who mated with their conquerors, producing a third group of racially mixed people.

History

The *Zerfred Grapevine* illustrates the conflict between groups with a longstanding, complex, and interrelated history: the arrival of the Europeans in both countries; the emergence of the British dominance in both Métis rebellions involving people such as Louis Riel in Canada and Hermanus Matroos and James Read Jr. in South Africa; growing self-consciousness based on feelings of common ethnicity and geo-political concerns; and economic and cultural connections between Canada and South Africa. The slide presentation also illustrates the link between the two countries with the respect to mobility, education and politics.

During the nineteenth century, Canada and South Africa were both part of the British Empire. Many British officers retired from Wellington's army and immigrated to the new colonies, where they helped form the governing classes, supplanting both French Canadians and Afrikaaners. J.W. Moodie participated in the development of both South Africa and Canada. After spending ten years in South Africa, he immigrated to Canada at the insistence of his wife, Susannah Moodie, the author of *Roughing it in the Bush*. Another example of the link between the two countries as part of the British Empire is that of Sir Benjamin Durban, an English governor in both South Africa and Canada who is now buried in the Gardens of Remembrance in Pointe Claire, Quebec, Canada.

War

Friction between the Boers and the British Empire led to the outbreak of the Boer War in 1900. The prior conflict between British and French on the Plains of Abraham was to have an impact on Canada's involvement in the South African war. While Canada was generally supportive of involvement, Quebec viewed the war as irrelevant at best. We commemorate the Canadian soldiers who died in this war with a statue in Dominion Square and have buried their dead at the Gardens of Remembrance.

Politics

In the twentieth century, Canadian contributed to the Group Areas Act that affected the Métis in South Africa. A white commission of inquiry from South Africa reported on the progress of the

Canadian Indian reserve system for the controlling native tribes. Thus Canada in some measure assisted the eventual development of South Africa policy, which involved uprooting families to remote areas. The Group Areas Act was finally abolished in 1990.

Despite Canada, under the leadership of Canada Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, formally ejecting South Africa from the commonwealth, political, economic, and cultural links with South Africa continued throughout the modern era.

Acculturation

The *Zerfred Grapevine* further illustrates the striking cultural similarities between the two nations of Métis in education, language, religion, identification, classification, and family traditions.

Language

The Métis of both countries adopted culture, tradition, and religious values from the settlers. The Métis people developed the Métis language. Today, the Métis language in Canada has faded while the language of their South African cousins has flourished with the help of the Huguenot and Dutch descended Boers. The Afrikaans language spoken by the Métis of South Africa is a language that the Khoikhoi, San, and slaves created in order to communicate with Europeans. Recognizing the validity of the language, the Dutch adapted it from its originator to develop it into its current South African identity. However, the Dutch never acknowledged the contribution of the Khoi-khoi (people of people) to the Afrikaans language; they used it to their own socio-economic and political advantage. Afrikaans, then, a language originating from the Khoi-khoi, is a blend of many Europeans and native languages: Khoisan, Dutch, English, Portuguese, Spanish, French, and German. The feeling of ethnic and racial identity symbolized in the distinct languages of both Métis cultures is very striking.

The Church

The church had a deep impact on the lives of the Métis of both nations. In Canada, the Métis developed a strong bond, which the Catholic faith developed first among the indigenous people and then passed on through intermarriage with the French. Instrumental to the expansion of New France were the Recollect and Jesuit missionaries and the Grey Sisters who imposed European culture through the Catholic faith on their native allies. One such convert Kateri Tekwitha, the Lily of the Mohawks, was recently canonized.

In South Africa in 1664, Moravian, Dutch, German and British missionaries converted the Khoi-khoi to Christianity. A Khoi woman, Vehette, was converted, baptized, and given the biblical name of Magdalena by a German missionary in Genadendal, Cape province. The Dutch Reformed and Moravian Church flourished among the Métis of South Africa.

The Métis of both nations adopted the family names the European gave them. They also adopted for their own use many European traditions, values, and attitudes, fusing these creatively with elements of their own culture.

The *Zerfred Grapevine* is unique; it creates a special feeling of identity which can be shared with all.