

The Sash

The distinct Red Voyageur Sash pattern is easily recognized as Métis. It has been a symbol of the Métis since the time of the fur traders. Today, sashes are worn as a symbol of pride and celebration but during the fur trade, a sash was daily wear for the Métis. Men often wore their sashes folded in half and tied around the waist creating a pocket for tobacco, medicines and fire starters. The Sash had many practical uses. Not only would it keep capotes closed, it was also used as a wash cloth and towel, thread for sewing, a rope, a belt or as markers left on buffalo during a hunt. They were also used as back support while carrying furs.

The Sash has been worn since the late 1700s. Traditionally Métis sashes were handmade by finger weaving. Each Sash would have between 32 and 42 strands and would take 70 to 300 hours to complete, depending on the pattern and experience of the weaver. This method was adapted from the First Nations practice of finger braiding with nettle fiber, buffalo hair and hemp, the French Canadian practice of making braided woolen garters and the Norwegian finger weaving styles. You could tell which area the Métis family was from based on the pattern of their sash.

Due to the time and skill required for handmade sashes, not everyone had access to them. To solve this, L'Assomption Quebec started to mass produce the Voyageur Sash we recognize today. As early as 1800, they began making sashes on looms. This made sashes affordable and accessible for everyone. Sashes were then sold in varying qualities and price ranges. The most expensive sashes were made of thin wool strands dipped in wax. Dipping the fibers in wax made a water proof sash that could be used to carry small amounts of water or as a cup on the trail.



The Colours of the Sash

Red is for our Métis blood that was shed

Blue is for our depth of spirit

Green is for the fertility of our Nation

White is for our connection to God and the Creator

Yellow is for the prospect of prosperity

Black is for the dark period of suppression and dispossession of Métis people and land