

From the National Film Board of Canada



WOMEN IN THE SHADOWS

Like a broken necklace, the history of First Nations women in Canada's fur trade has been scattered and forgotten. But one woman decided to piece it back together, bead by precious bead, to reconstruct her heritage and find her place among her people. **Women in the Shadows** is a deeply personal documentary film which follows Métis writer and filmmaker Christine Welsh on a spiritual and physical journey in search of her Native identity, uncovering in the process a lost chapter in Canadian history.

WOMEN IN THE SHADOWS



WOMEN IN THE SHADOWS

A Direction Films/National Film Board of Canada
Studio D co-production

Director: Norma Bailey

Producers: Christine Welsh, Signe Johansson

55 minutes 50 seconds

Order number: C 9191 146



Closed captioned for the deaf and hard of hearing. A decoder is required.



VHS
113C

9191 146



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WOMEN IN THE SHADOWS

As she probes into her Métis roots, Christine Welsh encounters unexpected walls of silence that disturb and provoke her. Unable to explain this "amnesia and silence and haunting sense of loss," she embarks on a quest for her Native ancestors.

For almost 200 years, beginning with the founding of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670, the fur trade dominated the history of what is now Western Canada. From it, there emerged a unique society which drew upon both Indian and European customs and technology. Symbolic of this mixing of two cultures were the Métis—the "new people" who were the product of widespread intermarriage between the European traders and Indian women.

Combining documentary filmmaking with dramatic recreations of memory and history, **Women in the Shadows** is a tribute to First Nations women. It takes them "out of the shadows" of history and gives them back their voice. The film articulates Métis women's experience of racism in both an historical and contemporary context and examines some of the events and forces that pushed these women into the margins of Canadian history and society. In the end, it is the story of one woman's reconciliation with her past, her people and herself—both a coming to term with loss and a celebration of survival. As Métis historian Emma LaRocque points out "When people change, they do not necessarily lose their identities. People are flexible, adaptive and creative. Culture is what people do together. It is a living and recreative process."¹

Writer
Christine Welsh

Director
Norma Bailey

Director of Photography
James Jeffrey

Editor
Lara Mazur

Location Sound
David Husby

Sound Editor
Debra Rurak

Original Music
Martin Gotfrit

Re-recording
Paul Sharpe

Producer
Christine Welsh

Executive Producer
Tony Snowsill

Producer for Studio D
Signe Johansson

Executive Producer for Studio D
Ginny Stikeman

Produced by Direction Films
in co-production with Studio D
of the National Film Board
of Canada
and with the participation of
Telefilm Canada

in association with
National Film Board of
Canada/Pacific Region Studio and
CanWest Pacific Television Inc.

and with the assistance of
Multiculturalism and Citizenship
Canada,
TVOntario,
Saskatchewan Communications
Network,
Access Network,
Manitoba Educational Television,
Knowledge Network,
Northern Native Broadcasting/Yukon,
Nova Scotia Educational Media

Distributed by the National Film
Board of Canada

Color
55 minutes 50 seconds

Order numbers:
C 0191 146 (film)
C 9191 146 (video)

THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

- Repercussions of cultural assimilation.
- The role of First Nations women in the fur trade.
- Factors contributing to the changing status of First Nations women in pre-Confederation Canada.
- Impact of changing status on future generations.
- Link between historical decline in the status of First Nations women in pre-Confederation Canada.
- Link between historical decline in the status of First Nations women and their current condition.
- Differences between Métis and other First Nations.
- The tradition of oral history and how First Nations women can use it to reclaim their history.

SUGGESTED READING

Allen, Paula G. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986

Brant, Beth. *A Gathering of Spirit*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1988

Campbell, Maria. *Halfbreed*. Halifax: Goodread Biographies, 1983

Perreault, Jeanne and Vance, Sylvia. *Native women of western Canada: writing the circle: an anthology*. Edmonton: NeWest Publishers Ltd., 1990

Peterson, Jacqueline and Brown, Jennifer S. H. *The New peoples: being and becoming Métis in North America*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1987

Van Kirk, Sylvia M. *"Many tender ties": women in fur-trade society, 1670-1870*. Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd., 1980

RELATED NFB FILMS AND VIDEOS

As Long As The Rivers Flow A series of five one-hour documentaries examining different aspects of the Native struggle for self-determination.

Daughters of the Country A two-part series of four hour-long films dramatizing the evolution of the Métis people.

Our Home and Native Land A film and resource guide for Aboriginal Canadians, available free of charge.



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¹ Emma LaRocque, "Conversations on Métis Identity" In *Prairie Fire* (Vol. VII, No 1; Spring 1986)