

## Misks ki posapawahahka

Aaksistowapaakii - a woman of courage.

First Nations women played a key role in the economy and politics of late nineteenth century Western Canada. Very few of these women are remembered in history books but Misks ki posapawahahka is an exception.

Misks ki posapawahahka was Aaksistowapaakii – a woman of courage. An expert horse-woman, she sometimes joined the men in the buffalo hunt. When the need arose, she stood up for herself and her younger siblings, even if it meant going against elder male relatives.

D.W. Davis courted Misks ki posapawahahka when he was trading at the Elbow River for Healy & Hamilton in 1873, but she did not agree to marry him until one of her brothers suffered severe wounds and Davis helped him.

Misks ki posapawahahka and Davis had five children together. When Davis wrote to his family in Vermont, telling them that his work was not without danger, he failed to mention his powerful wife or their children. Three of their children grew up in Fort Macleod as part of the growing Euro-Canadian community. The youngest two were twins and were brought up among Kainai relatives after Misks ki posapawahahka died, shortly after giving birth.

Davis married schoolteacher Lillie Grier before his election as a Member of Parliament. Misks ki posapawahahka was left to history.

### Niitsitapiisinni Women

Niitsitapiisinni women were well known for their skill at tanning hides and sewing clothes. Their elegant white hide dresses mimicked the form of the animal, as if the elk's body encased the woman for protection. On the most elaborate dress, four rows of elk teeth flowed across the bodice to symbolize the four stages of human life. The sweep of the teeth reflected makoiyohsokoyi - the wolf trail (or Milky Way) - and reminded people of the proper way of coexisting in the world.

Only the lower two incisors of the male elk were used to decorate dresses. A large number of teeth indicated that the woman came from a family with good hunters and strong leaders. An elk tooth dress was a symbol of prestige.



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