

The Founders of Manitoba Métis Federation

In 1967, at the annual meeting of the Indian and Métis Conference, sponsored by the Winnipeg Community Welfare and Planning Council, a number of Métis attending the meeting realized that they could only make their concerns heard if they had an independent voice. They subsequently met in private and decided to form a Federation of Métis people. Thus the Manitoba Métis Federation was founded on October 1, 1967 and incorporated as a non-profit association under the Companies Act of Manitoba in December of 1967. Those present at the first meeting, who can be called the founders of MMF, were Reverend Adam Cuthand, Elizabeth Isbister, Ted Simard, Mary Guilbault, Tom Eagle and Angus Spence.

After adoption of a Constitution the first board of directors were: Reverend Adam Cuthand (President), Ferdinand Guiboche (Dauphin Region), John Fiddler (The Pas Region), Ed Simard (Southern Region) and Tom Eagle (Winnipeg Region). At first MMF operations were supported by funding from various churches and businesses. The first office was located at 453 Notre Dame Avenue in Winnipeg. Along with President Cuthand the MMF had staff members, Joe Keeper (Executive Director), Percy Bird (Consultant) and Valerie Klyne (Secretary). There were also four field workers: Andrew Kirkness (Thomson Area), Joe Cooke (Grand Rapids), Angus Spence (Dauphin Area) and Joe Thomas Jr. (Traverse Bay area).

Elder George Fleury recalls that his was elected to the board of MMF when the first elections were held (August 17, 1968). He says the six regions (Winnipeg was not included) elected:

Angus Spence: President
Connie Thomas Eyofson: VP Southeast Region
George Fleury: VP Southwest Region
Alfred Head: VP Pas Region
Ben Thompson: VP Thompson Region
Walter Menard: VP Northwest Region
Howard Asham: Interlake Region

At the time of the founding of most of the Métis political organizations in western Canada the activists were made up of Métis and Non-Status Indians. Many of the Non-Status Indians could easily identify with Métis because their mothers or fathers were married to a Métis spouse or they had grandparents who were Métis. Many of the women involved with the Manitoba Métis Federation development had lost their First Nations status when they married Métis men. Elizabeth Isbister and Mary Guilbault are examples of these women. At the time the MMF constitution allowed membership of enfranchised Indians – i.e. anyone who had lost their treaty rights or who had given up his/ her treaty rights.

Ferdinand Guiboche recalls the MMF's founding:

I first met Angus (Spence) seated across from me at a large table in the Marlborough Hotel. It was fall of 1967. The Chair of the meeting was the Chief of Hollow Water a

gentleman by the name of [George] Barker. He said a few words as I was sitting on his left when turned to me and said, "OK you're next." I responded I am not sure I'm in the right place because I was Métis and did not speak an Indian language. Then I asked if anyone there were Métis. A few people raised their hands one of whom was Angus another George McKay. Shortly afterward we broke for coffee.

Angus Spence made his way over to me and introduced himself noting he was Métis. I was immediately impressed so we went for lunch to talk about who we were, what our thinking was and the clear need for an organization to represent us. We agreed our people must come together to decide their future. As soon as the group reconvened Angus stood up to address the Assembly. He was a very good speaker pointing out the need for us to meet. The Chair then asked him to make a Motion which he did and inquired if he had someone to second it. "Yes" he said at which point I stood to introduce myself.

A room was set up for us and the rest is history. Some of the others attending were Adam Cuthand, Joe Keeper, Mary Guilbault, Herman Burston and Tom Eagle (Joe Keeper may still have minutes of the meeting). So I describe Angus and myself as co-founders of the modern day Métis movement.

Fortunat Guiboche
April 12, 2006

Dr. Adam Cuthand was appointed as the first "voluntary non-paid" president. MMF is an affiliate of the Métis National Council. The first non-elected Board of Directors (1967-1969) were Reverend Adam Cuthand, Joe Keeper and Alfred Disbrowe.

Biographies of MMF Founders

(Arranged alphabetically)

Flight Sergeant Clifford Howard Asham. (1914-1998)

WWII Veteran Howard Asham, from Fisher Bay was born in April of 1914, the son of James William and Caroline Asham of Fisher Branch. In 1967 he assisted in organizing the Manitoba Métis Federation for the Interlake. He served as vice president for the region for eight years until ill health forced his retirement. He also drove the first school bus to transport the children from Fisher Bay to Fisher River.

Howard Asham joined the R.C.A.F.A. in 1940 in Winnipeg. He went overseas in February of 1943 and was stationed at Topcliffe, Yorkshire, servicing Wellington bomber planes. After three months he was transferred to Africa in the Sahara Desert servicing the Wellington's that were bombing in Italy. He then returned to England and was stationed at Skipton, Yorkshire until the end of the war. After six months he rejoined the Air Force. He was stationed variously at Watson Lake, Yukon, Churchill, Tacoma, Washington and involved with the American Air force taking troops to Korea. He then returned to England, was then stationed at Lachine and ended up at Rivers in charge of quality control until he retired in 1964. He was actively involved in the Hodgson Legion and was

President of Legion # 158 from 1967 to 1975 and again from 1978 to 1981, and then was immediate past president.¹

He retired to his original homeplace at Fisher River where he lived with his wife Nora. He had two brothers Orton and Ebenezer who were also WWII Veterans.

Howard became involved in the Manitoba Métis Federation in 1967 when the organization was just being formed. At the General Conference in he was elected as field worker and as a Director. Due to financial constraints these positions were carried out on a voluntary basis. He served as the Interlake Regional Secretary Treasurer for two years and then as Senior Director of the Regional Board. He resigned that position to run for Vice Presidency after Murray Sinclair stepped down in 1973. He was elected for three terms serving from 1973-1979.

Reverend Adam Cuthand:

Dr. Adam Cuthand was born in 1913 on the Little Pine Reserve of the Battleford Agency in Saskatchewan. He is the grandson of a Chief involved in the Battle of Cutknife Hill during the 1885 Resistance. He studied theology and arts at the University of Saskatchewan then taught school from 1938-1941 on the Little Island Reserve. In 1940 he gave up his treaty status and became enfranchised in order to vote provincially and federally. In 1941 he joined the Canadian Armed Forces as a radar technician and rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant. After discharge in 1945 he became an ordained Anglican Priest and was assigned to work with Aboriginal people in the diocese of Rupert's Land.

Always active in Native politics, he was involved with the National Indian Council and the National Métis Society and elected President of the latter group in 1968. Adam Cuthand served as President of the Indian-Métis Federation of Manitoba and was a founding member of the Manitoba Métis Federation and was the first appointed president of Manitoba Métis Federation in 1968. The University of Winnipeg awarded him an Honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree in 1970. In 1970 Canon Cuthand also received Manitoba's Centennial Medal.

Alfred Disbrowe:

Alfred Disbrowe was born on February 22, 1906 at Little Grand Rapids, Manitoba, the son of Frederick Augustus Disbrowe (1852-1963) and Caroline Berens. Alfred was married to Grace McDonald of Berens River, the daughter of Roderick and Sarah McDonald. Grace was born on Sigurdson Island and was raised in Berens River. Alfred died on November 29, 1988. His father Fred Disbrowe was a fish buyer and clerk for Dominion Fish Companies at various outposts around Lake Winnipeg. In the 1880s Fred met William Berens at Bullhead on Lake Winnipeg and they became good friends. William's father was Chief Jacob Berens and William went on to succeed him as chief, in 1916. After Frederick's first wife Maria (Cree, b. 1874) died he married Caroline Berens. Fred became one of the first school teachers at Poplar River.

¹ A. Brian Cyr CD. *Métis Veterans of Manitoba: From Buffalo to Battlefields*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation, 2010: 75.

Alfred Disbrowe served on the original board of the Manitoba Métis Federation from 1967 to 1969. John Morrisseau recalls that Alfred was from Berens River but lived in Winnipeg at the time.

William Dumont. (b. 1928)

Willie Dumont was born at Perigord, Saskatchewan on March 24, 1928, the son of Alphonse Dumont (b. 1900) and Anna Claire Louise Chartrand (b. 1904). His paternal grandparents were Xavier Dumont (b. 1870, d.1949) and Alexandrine Thibault (b.1878).

Willie married Therese Chartrand, born February 23, 1926, the daughter of Maggie Devlin and Ludovic Chartrand. The couple had twelve children. Willie was an auto mechanic and started his own service garage. He started a beach resort-campground at St. Laurent on what is now Lake Manitoba Estates. In 1971 he started with the provincial government working for planning and priorities committee of cabinet. He then became a community development officer, Agriculture, for St. Laurent. He subsequently owned the Laurentia Café and Tri-Star Construction.

Willie was one of the founding members of the Manitoba Métis Federation. He was on the board of directors 1976-1977; 1979-1981 and 1983-1984 and was a Vice-President for Interlake Region for several years. He was one of the men who recruited John Morrisseau to become an organizer for MMF in the early years. John then went on to become President of MMF. Willie's son Yvon followed him into politics and served MMF from 1985 to 1993. Yvon was also the founding vice president of the Native council of Canada then President of the National Métis Council. He was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba in 1993 and served until 1999.

Norbert Thomas Eagle:

Tom Eagle was a founder of the Manitoba Métis Federation (1966), the National Indian Brotherhood (1967) and the Native Council of Canada. He was also responsible for the revival of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

Tom Eagle was born at Skownan Manitoba on June 6, 1932. He was raised at Tootinaowaziibeeng (Valley River), Manitoba. He attended the Pine Creek residential school. He enlisted in the Canadian Army at age 19 with hopes of being assigned to the Korean conflict, however, he was sent instead to Germany as part of the NATO peacekeeping force. Within six months he was promoted to Corporal and later while serving with the United Nations peacekeeping force in Cyprus, he became a platoon commander and attained the rank of Sergeant.



In 1955, Tom married Margaret Muriel Strynadka and over the next six years they had five children. Tom was later stationed in Victoria, Winnipeg and Yellowknife. While in Winnipeg he became actively involved in Aboriginal issues and helped to form many Aboriginal organizations.

Between 1968 and 1969, Tom acted as chief spokesman for Métis people at the Federal Housing Task Force, the House of Commons and Senate Committees for Constitutional Reforms and the Senate Committee on Poverty. As a result of this he was successful in developing the government of Manitoba's Remote Housing Program in 1969. He was also responsible for the development of the Kinew Housing Corporation in Winnipeg.

While in Winnipeg Tom became involved with the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre movement. He served as a director of the Winnipeg centre from 1965 to 1970. He later became involved in developing Friendship Centres throughout Canada's north. He headed up the Tree of Peace Friendship Centre at Yellowknife as executive director from 1979 to 1984, and then again from 1986 to 2002. After he became chair of the Northwest Territories/Yukon Friendship Centre Association, he helped establish centres in Fort Smith, Fort Simpson, Hay River, Fort Providence, Rankin Inlet and Behchoko.

Of all his accomplishments, Eagle was especially proud of his military career. He joined the Canadian Army in 1951 at the age of 19, and was honorably discharged with the rank of sergeant after a 25-year career that included two tours of military duty in West Germany and service with the United Nations peacekeeping force in Cyprus.

His awards and honors include the Canadian Forces Decoration, Queen's Jubilee Medal, Citation from the Government of Canada for his contribution to community work and the Veteran's Affairs Commendation. After a short illness, Tom passed away on September 29, 2009.

Constance Thomas Eyolfson. (1936-2002)

Connie was the daughter of a commercial fisherman, Joseph (Josie) Thomas and Elizabeth Maud (Jennings). She was born at Traverse Bay, Manitoba in 1936. At sixteen she left school to earn a living as a housekeeper, first in Winnipeg, then at Pine Falls.

From 1954 on, she served for three years with the Royal Canadian Air Force as an aircraft-refinishing technician. At age 21, she married Gerald Eyolfson and they subsequently had nine children. When first married they moved to Pine Falls where she began working at the hospital. During 1967-70, she was employed at a clothing factory, then at Children's Home of Winnipeg at their summer camp at Hillside Beach. Later, when Children's Home closed this camp, Connie bought it to serve as the site for Strong Earth Woman's Lodge.

Connie was always a community activist. In February 1971, in response to the poor housing conditions of the Métis at Traverse Bay, she formed the Traverse Bay Métis Association, to serve as a non-profit housing corporation. She was then elected as Secretary-Treasurer of the Association. In June of the same year elected as Vice-President of the South-West Region of the MMF. She was re-elected by acclamation for two further terms in 1972 and 1973 (a two-year term).

Connie was appointed as Acting Provincial President of the MMF in May of 1973, to serve during the time that Angus Spence was granted a leave of absence. This appointment, initially made by the Board of Directors, was ratified at the following Annual General Assembly of MMF. She was also a founding member of the Traverse Bay (fisherman's) Co-op.

Until her retirement, Connie was a long-term employee of the Canada Secretary of State department. She was involved as a volunteer for many other community groups. She served on the Board of Directors of the Family Planning Association of Manitoba; the Executive Committee of the Pregnancy Distress Service; the Fisherman's License Appeal Board; and the Remote Housing Committee. After retirement she ran "Strong Earth Woman's Lodge," a healing center south of Grand Marais, Manitoba.

George Fleury. (b. 1935)

George Fleury is one of the founders of the Manitoba Métis Federation. In the first election in 1968 he was elected as Vice President from the South West Region.² He went on to serve on the MMF Board of Directors until 1979. The SW Region Board worked out of Minnedosa for three years then in 1971 George opened the first MMF office in Brandon.

George was born at Ste. Madeleine, Manitoba on March 12, 1935. He is the son of Jean Edouard Fleury (1900-1974) and Anne Ledoux (1902-1964). His paternal grandparents are Francois "Frank" Fleury and Margaret Lagimodiere; his maternal grandfather was Napoleon Ledoux. The family lived at Ste. Madeleine until their home and land was expropriated by under the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act and turned into community pasture. George first attended Balmarina School near Binscarth after the family had moved onto Wilbur Wright's land at Binscarth. George returned to school for grade two when Family Allowances were established and children had to attend school for mothers to get the allowance. He then had to walk six miles to school; located at Fouillard's Corner. George was out on his own working as a seasonal worker from age fifteen.

² Steve Lavallee and Rita McTavish were elected as members at large from SW Region in that election.

George married Edith Leaming in 1957. They were living in the valley at Binscarth and moved to Minnedosa in the 1960s. After George overcame an alcohol addiction problem he went on to have a long career as a counselor with the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, having started with them in 1980. Since his retirement in 1999 he has dedicated himself to music, reviving the old Michif³ songs and has been a long-time member of the MMF Michif Language Committee. George sings and plays guitar. His father Jean Fleury was a well-known Métis fiddler.

Their son John Fleury has followed his father into politics and is a member of the MMF Board of Directors. He was first elected in 2000 and has held major portfolios in the Métis government. He also serves on the Board of Governors of the Métis National Council. Their daughter Georgina Liberty is the Director of Métis Tripartite Self Government Negotiations for MMF.

Ferdinand Guiboche:

Ferdinand was born at Camperville, Manitoba in August 1934. He has been a lifelong resident of Camperville with the exception of three years (1953-1956) in the army with the Royal Highland Regiment, "The Blackwatch." He served for one year in Korea. After fishing in the north, he worked in the general store in Camperville. He eventually bought this store which was originally owned by his grandfather, Mr. Desrochers. He started the Camperville Métis Association in 1966 and went on to serve as a founding member and the third President of MMF (1974-1975). Ferdinand served as a Senator on the short-lived MMF Senate. He was also a school trustee for three years in the Duck Mountain School Division and Chairman of the Town Council. He was instrumental in the formation of the Northern Association of Community Councils in Manitoba. For a number of years he held an appointment to the Multi-Cultural Council of Canada.

Mary Bowers Guilbault:

Mary and her late husband Ernie Guilbault are considered to be pivotal in the founding of Manitoba Métis Federation. Mary served on the MMF Board of Directors from 1975 to 1978 and held the Education Portfolio. During 1986-1988, her daughter Myra Laramée served on the MMF board.

Mary was born on June 19, 1930 in Fisher River, Manitoba, the daughter of Elijah and Priscilla Bowers. She grew up speaking Cree on the Fisher River First Nation. She spent many of her childhood years on the land with her parents and grandparents, trapping, hunting and fishing.

In the fall of 1943, the Indian Agent whisked her away to Residential School, first at Brandon for several years, then to Birtle Manitoba where she completed high school. It

³ George refers to his Métis language as "Cree" as do most of the older Michif speakers.



was at this time that she became convinced that education was of great importance in order to compete within the larger society. She is a retired social worker from the Manitoba Department of Health and Social Services. She worked in this position for twenty six years.

Mary met Ernie Guilbault shortly after completing school and they married on June 23, 1950. Ernie Guilbault was born and raised in Fannystelle. They settled in Winnipeg and raised five daughters, all of whom completed post secondary education and obtained employment in various professional fields, from education to social work. She is the grandmother of nine grandchildren and thirteen great-grandchildren.

In 2008, the *Mary Guilbault Métis Bursary* was established in her honour at the University of Winnipeg.

Mary Guilbault: photo courtesy of Shannon Allard

Mary's contributions to the community include:

- The housing study that resulted in the Lord Selkirk Park Housing Development
- An upgrading program that became nationally recognized and adopted by Canada Manpower
- Forming the Aboriginal Court Communicators Program with Judge J. Rice, Judge Ian Dubiński and Dorothy Betz.
- The establishment of the Prince of Wales/Princess Ann bursary for Métis students
- The establishment of counseling and tutoring services for the faculties of Nursing, Education and social Work at Brandon University and the University of Manitoba
- The establishment of satellite universities in northern Manitoba resulting in Assiniboine College and Keewatin College
- The establishment of the Median Credit Union
- President of the Board of Kinew Housing in 1970
- Member of the Board of directors on Métis Women of Manitoba

In recent years she has been sitting on the following boards:

- The Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba
- The All Nations Traditional Healing Centre Inc.
- The Louis Riel Institute, as an appointee of the Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy

For the last few years she has also been a presenter and Elder at the *Shawane Dagošiwini: Aboriginal Education Research Forums* in Winnipeg. Thus she continues to provide guidance to vast numbers of Aboriginal youth and adults. In promoting the traditional cultural values of the ancestors, she says “for me, the revitalization of my culture and traditional identity many years ago has assisted me with issues that have traumatized me in the past. Understanding the wisdom and spirituality of our ancestors brings many benefits into the everyday lives of our people.”

The Mary Guilbault Bursary, a Métis student bursary has been set up to assist Métis youth in attending post-secondary education in Manitoba.

Alfred R. Head. (b. 1915)

Alfred Head was born on November 15, 1915 at The Pas, Manitoba. His father, Thomas Head, was a trapper and voyageur, born at Kinistino, Saskatchewan. His mother, also born at The Pas, was Lizzette Marcellais (1879-1955). Alfred's parents left The Pas to follow the boom years at Sturgeon Landing and Flin Flon, later settling at Cranberry Portage. Thomas died at an early age and Lizzette remarried James "Caribou" Smith from Montana. James had been a water boy for Buffalo Bill Cody. James freighted in the north with dog and horse teams, then settled in Cranberry Portage where he ran a draying business. He died in 1954 at age 95.

Alfred attended Residential School for a number of years, and then took his first job as a commercial fisherman before becoming a shaft miner at Elbow Lake in 1938. At Cranberry Portage he met and married Margaret Wyckstandt (also a Métis) in 1935. They lived with his parents in Cranberry Portage while Alfred worked as a fisherman. The following year they moved to Flin Flon and he got a job with the RCMP working as a special constable, guide and interpreter in northern Manitoba. He also worked for a time for Hudson's Bay Mining and Smelting. After their third child was born, he joined the Army and was overseas for five years.

During World War II, Alfred served in the Canadian Army in the Mediterranean Theatre and in northwest Europe. Six of Alfred's brothers were in the Armed Forces, three in the First World War and three in the second. Following the war, he worked from Ontario to the Yukon as a diamond drill operator. He then returned to school and became an instructor in woodwork and carpentry at Keewatin Community College in The Pas.

Alfred was elected as Vice President for The Pas Region of the Manitoba Métis Federation and served as a political leader from that area up until his retirement. He was also a director of The Pas Indian and Métis Friendship Centre, a Board Member of Native Clan Organization, the first President of the Cranberry Portage Canadian Legion and a member of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

Elizabeth Crowe Isbister:

Elizabeth Isbister was born on May 12, 1920, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Crowe. Her father was from the James Bay area and her mother was from Big Trout Lake. When she was four they were at Island Lake when her mother died. She was then adopted by storekeeper and trader Harry D'Arcy. They then moved to God's Lake where she spent most of her youth. Elizabeth took her schooling at the residential school at Rossville where she spent seven years. She was active in CGIT at school and attributes this experience to the leadership skills she developed. She went on to develop a new mother's group at God's Lake and started an organization to get a school for Métis children at God's Lake. She then married Charles Isbister who worked with medical services. By marrying a Métis man she lost her Indian status.

They lived at God's Lake until 1960 when illness forced Charles to move to Norway House for medical treatment. At Norway House she continued to be very active in Manitoba Métis Federation as well as being active in organizing numerous family and community



programs to assist Métis people. In the late 1960s she was a vice-chairman of MMF; in 1972, she was on the Norway House Community Council, serving as mayor. She was a member of the National Anti-Poverty Organization, the National Native Women's Organization, and the Indian Rights for Indian Women Organization (which led to the Bill C-31 legislation). Into her late 70s she continued to serve on the Regional Health Authority board, child and family services, the board of the Norway House radio station and the board of the senior's residence. She also sat on the provincial Aboriginal Advisory Committee to the RCMP.

Elizabeth died on March 22, 2009, a woman who was loved and cherished by her family and friends. Elizabeth passed away at her home in Norway House in the early hours of March 22. Left to mourn her passing were her children, Donna (Det), Judy (Jim), Darlene, Wanda, Cameron (Jane), Dennis (Maggie), Michael, William (Winnie) and Keith (Brenda), her sister Frances Valiquette (Marcel), 21 grandchildren, numerous great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren, many relatives and friends in Norway House and beyond. She was predeceased by her parents Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Crowe, her husband Charles, her sons, Jimmy Crowe, Brian, Russell, a stillborn infant son, her grandson Gene and seven nephews.



Joseph Irvine Keeper, C.M., B.A.:

Joe Keeper was a founder of the Manitoba Métis Federation and also served as its Executive Director in 1969. Joseph I. Keeper was born on October, 1928 in Norway House the son of Christina McLeod and Joseph B. Keeper. His father, Joseph B. Keeper, attended the 1912 Olympics as a long distance runner where he placed 4th in the 10,000 metre race.

Joe began school at age six and later graduated from Portage Collegiate High School in 1946. After serving 14 months in the Korean War until 1957, Joe worked as a



surveyor in northern Canada for Canadian Nickel, a subsidiary of Inco.

In 1959 Joe married Phyllis Beady, an Anglican priest. In the 1950's Joe saw change coming for his people. Shortly afterwards he began employment as a Community Development Worker in Aboriginal communities. He says, "In 1960 the Grand Rapids Four Bay project was starting. Because a hydro dam was to be built, the native people had to be relocated. I worked at this for 3 1/2 years." In 1971 Joe began working on a federal level; grant processing was his area of expertise for 4 years. This proved a stepping stone for employment on the Northern Flood Committee. The Northern Flood Agreement was signed in 1977 and in 1990 a Proposed Basis of Settlement was signed.

Joe was a major contributor to native community development and self government, helping to improve economic conditions for his people. Joseph I. Keeper was a founding member of the Manitoba Métis Federation and the National Indian Council and in 1992 was appointed to the Order of Canada.⁴ Their statement at his investiture on April 21, 1993 said: "A founding member of the National Indian Council, he created several important Native institutions and is best known for his significant role in the Northern Flood Agreement. He has made major contributions to Native community development and self-government, helping to improve social and economic conditions for his people."

Former actress from CBC's *North of 60* series, and Member of Parliament,⁵ Tina Keeper is Joe's daughter.

George Edmund McKay. (b. 1904)

George McKay was the son of John James McKay (b. 1885) and Catherine McKay⁶ (b. 1884). His grandparents were Angus McKay (b. 1836), the brother of the Honourable James McKay, and Virginie Rolette the daughter of Joseph Rolette and Angelique Jerome of Pembina.

George was a pioneer from Berens River, about 200 air miles northeast on Lake Winnipeg. He was a lifelong fisherman and at age 73 (in 1979), he would still wander down to the river every now and then to fish. George and Marie Louise McKay had fourteen children. Mr. McKay initiated the Manitoba Métis Federation Local in Berens River and remained an active member. In March of 1978 at the Regional Conference, he was awarded an honorary plaque and a Métis Sash symbolizing an appreciation for his many years of service and dedication to local residents. He speaks fluent Saulteaux and English and understands a little Cree.

In 1979, he related the following stories: "Half-Breed was the most commonly used word for us in the early days because in the history of the Métis people, after the Riel Rebellion, they gave the "half-breeds" the land settlement. At that time they called it the Half-Breed Land Act. Now they call it the Scrip Land Act. I don't fancy the word "Métis" because it doesn't really give us an identity; to me, Métis means to be half-French only. To be a half-breed means you can be part anything."

⁴ Source: *Portraits of the North* <http://www.portraitsofthenorth.com/portrait/josephkeeper.html>

⁵ Tina was elected as a Liberal in Manitoba's Churchill riding.

⁶ His mother's father was a Goosehead (changed to Berens) from Little Grand Rapids.

“My granduncle was the Honourable James McKay, one of the early pioneers of Winnipeg. For some reason or other, he learned four or five languages. At one time, he owned all of the area where Silver Heights is now. He was the first to herd (domestic) buffalo in that area. He built a lodge where Deer Lodge now stands. That’s how it got its name.”

“James McKay was taken on as an interpreter for the government because he knew all these languages. He toured through all of the Lake Winnipeg area and helped make treaties with the Indians. In the meantime, my grandfather, Angus McKay, took a homestead at White Horse Plains and started a maple farm. His house later burned and his brother, James McKay, gave him the position of the first Indian Agent. He started his work at Fort Garry and traveled through surrounding areas where he’d be away all summer.”

“During his travels, Grandfather McKay went to Berens River and decided to stay. He asked to transfer his family there. This was granted, so he raised his family there. My father, who was raised in Berens River, met and married my Indian mother there. I’m very proud to be a Half-Breed because now it’s hard to find a real Half-Breed. Blood has been all mixed up as the centuries passed. My grandchildren have six or seven races of blood in them.”

“Today at 73 years of age, I am the oldest non-treaty resident in Berens River. We live alongside treaty people who call us outsiders, meaning we’re like White people because we’ve always had privileges such as voting. We’re non-treaty. We’re outsiders. If you live among White society, the White man calls you an Indian, so we’re right in the middle. We’re neither White nor Indian. I am very proud to be a Half-Breed because I have the instincts and knowledge of an Indian and the cunning and knowledge of a White man.”

“If the White society calls you down as an Indian, just tell them you’re a Half-Breed and proud of it. There’s a lot of discrimination, but maybe not so much with the younger generation as before. It’s too bad that children growing up in the city don’t learn their Native language.”

Reference:

Manitoba Métis Federation. *Reflections Yesterday and Today*, Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation Press, 1979: 80-81.

Walter Menard. (b. 1934)

Walter Menard is the son of Aime Menard (b. 1903) and Flora Flett. Aime worked on his father's farm until he took a homestead in Camperville. He married first Susan Nepinak in 1930. She passed away one year later. He then married Flora Flett in 1932. They lived in Camperville District until 1938 when they moved to St. Eustache, MB. They moved to Winnipeg for awhile and returned to Camperville in 1950 where he successfully farmed on NE 9-35-20. Aime and Flora had 10 children, 8 boys and 2 girls. Flora Jean Flett was the daughter of Henry Flett and Madeleine Brunette. She was born 1912 in Camperville, Manitoba.

In 1967 Walter assisted in organizing the Manitoba Métis Federation for the Northwest Métis Council Region. Walter went on to have a very colourful political career. He served as vice president for the region 1972-1974 and 1977-79. Walter’s wife,

Grace Menard also served on the MMF board from 1997-2000. Walter's younger brother was the late Winston Menard (1942-2008).⁷ Winston was President of the Swan River Friendship Centre for 25 years, he also served as the provincial board member of the Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres (MAC). At the NAFC's 34th Annual General Meeting (AGM), held July 5-8, 2005 in Grande Prairie, Alberta, Winston was honoured and awarded an Honourary Lifetime member of the NAFC.

Both men ran horse ranches and had PMU operations at one time. During the 1960s Walter and his brother Albert played guitar in a country band called the "Prairie Pals". Their singer was "Little Joe" Chartrand, other members were Albert Sutherland, Roderick Ross, Fred McKay and Gordon Chartrand.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s Walter was a Vice President of MMF and had numerous battles with MMF President John Morrisseau. The MMF placed the Regional MMF office under receivership and initiated an audit when the provincial organization filed suit against the local vice-president, Walter Menard. Walter formed a competing group called the Métis Confederacy of Manitoba of which he was president.

In 2008-09 Walter became president of the Indigenous People's Confederacy, a Congress of Aboriginal People's affiliate in Manitoba. In January of 2009 the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples suspended its entire Manitoba wing only days before Walter as the provincial president planned to go public with allegations of sexual harassment against the national chief, the Conservative-appointed Senator Patrick Brazeau. Mr. Brazeau was then re-elected to a four-year term. As a result, no congress members from Manitoba were allowed to attend the annual general meeting and the allegations did not become public until they were later published in The Globe and Mail.

John Morrisseau. (b. 1939)

John Morrisseau is a residential school survivor and esteemed Métis leader from Grand Rapids, Manitoba. He currently serves as a member of the Indian Residential Schools Survivor Committee. He was the Director of Public Participation for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

He has served the Manitoba Government in the capacity of Assistant Deputy Minister and Deputy Minister and the Manitoba Métis Federation as President from 1976 to 1981. Mr. Morrisseau is considered a Métis historian and is a recipient of the Order of the Métis Nation in recognition of his dedicated service to his people and Nation. Mr. John Morrisseau served as President of the Manitoba Métis Federation from 1976 to 1981.



John was born on August 18, 1939 at St. Rose du Lac, Manitoba, the son of Bella Moar and Ernest Morrisseau. His mother, born at Kinosota, was the Michif-Ojibwa daughter of John Moar and Louisa Asham. His father, born at Spence Lake, was the

⁷ Winston also lent his leadership skills to the LGD of Mountain, the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), Northwest Local Management Board, Bigstone MMF Local, the Dauphin Plains Credit Union and the Swan River Headstart Advisory Committee.

Ojibwa-Michif son of Jean Baptiste Morrisseau (St. Francois Xavier) and Cecile Nault (St. Rose du Lac).

John took grade eight then was a fisher and trapper at Crane River. He also worked on an extra gang and a surface driller at Thompson. In 1960, John married Nellie Sinclair from Grand Rapids. John entered the Canadian Forces at age 18 and served for six years, leaving in 1964. He worked for Indian Affairs at Fort McMurray. He then began working as a truck driver, came back to Manitoba and also worked for Manitoba Highways as a grader operator.

In 1966 John became politically active. Since John was truck driving he worked at this from Mondays to Thursdays, then for the rest of the week worked as a Métis political organizer with Howard Asham and Willie Dumont, going to organizing meetings. In 1967, Adam Cuthand asked him to organize a Métis local at Grand Rapids.

Mr. Morrisseau recalls in 1976, the Liberal government under Pierre Trudeau was willing to provide federal dollars to fund mutual claims research on land claim issues such as outlined under the Manitoba Act.

His team including Harry Daniels and Sam Sinclair began the task to put together a proposal. The proposal would require people to go through the archives to search for material to support the claim but the issue was there were no Métis with the skills to do the job. Doug Sprague who had the skills and is a well known historian, was hired to train Métis.

After working with different government departments in drafting the proposal, it was presented to the Trudeau government for consideration.

Through intense negotiation, they were able to secure research funding through 1981 which allowed for intensive examination of church, and Hudson Bay Company records.

Mr. Morrisseau says Trudeau staff clearly saw the land claim like a treaty believing an opportunity existed to repatriate the Constitution.

In 1981, MMF President John Morrisseau told the Métis and Non-Status Indian Constitutional review Commission: "We can't draw up the rights of a new constitution when our rights entrenched in the Manitoba Act of 1870 are still outstanding. We're only putting ourselves back and giving them another way out. First of All, let's settle the issue that's there, that's the issue of land claims."

Moreover, the absence within the patriation resolution of a requirement for Métis consent to constitutional amendments affecting them raised the real possibility of government removing the Métis land rights sections of the Manitoba Act that the MMF intended to make the subject of major litigation. Mr. Morrisseau said "If the Government of Canada was to repeal section 31 and 32 of the Manitoba Act through an amending process, we would consider such a maneuver to be the greatest breach of faith in Canadian history."



John Morrisseau, March 3-4, 1981,
speaking to the Métis and Non-Status Indian Constitutional Review Commission
in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

On April 15th, 1981, the Native Council of Canada joined the Manitoba Métis Federation in a major land claims suit against the federal government and the Government of Manitoba. The Statement of Claim *MMF v. Canada* challenged the unfulfilled treaty promises made to the Métis people promising 1.4 million acres of land under the Manitoba Act, 1870

After leaving the MMF in 1981, Mr. Morrisseau joined the Howard Powley NDP government as an Assistant Deputy Minister hoping by working inside government, he could continue his valuable work for the Métis. He rose to become Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs, a position he left on March 31, 1987.

Mr. Morrisseau says “The work to file the land claim helped to re-kindle pride in Métis. It was time to lift our heads again to feel good about ourselves and it helped us to build strong Métis communities.”

Now retired, John Morrisseau currently lives in Grand Rapids, Manitoba and serves as mayor of that town. He and his wife Nelly are celebrating 46 years together. They have two daughters and four sons, and four grandchildren.

The following newspaper article appeared upon his election as president of MMF in 1976:

Winnipeg Free Press (Newspaper) - July 22, 1976, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
By Bob Lowery, Cranberry Portage

Morrisseau new head of Métis, plans reorganization

JOHN MORRISSEAU whose varied experience will likely be of some assistance to him in his new position of president of the Manitoba Métis Federation. Mr. Morrisseau is from Crane River.

John Morrisseau, a Crane River rancher, trapper, armed forces trooper, trucker, metro-transit bus driver and Ben Hur pony chariot racer has been handed the reins of the Manitoba Métis Federation at what is doubtless the most critical moment in the organization's history. At the federation's eighth annual assembly here last weekend, the 230 delegates from 100 locals throughout the province elected him president over incumbent president Ed Head, Norval Desjarlas of Winnipeg and Don McIvor, former mayor of Wabowden.

The mild mannered yet forceful Mr. Morrisseau says his biggest immediate task is to deal with the financial state of the organization. As of last March, it had a \$77,586 deficit. It received grants of 307,935 from the federal secretary of state department and 80,000 from the province. Total expenditures were 465,419.

The new president says he wants to get all the facts on the financial plight by mid August. Then he plans to reorganize the whole financial management structure and hopes to get his ship back on course without cuts in staff. As well as any increased revenue from government sources, the organization should start a series of bingoes and other money raising projects to help reduce the debt, he said.

Facts sought

"I don't say we'll be out of the red by-March 31, 1977, but we will definitely demonstrate that we are moving in a new he says. Mr. Morrisseau aims at giving control of the federation back to local and regional branches. "More than anything I want to unite this organization he says. During the convention he spoke in favor of a motion to retain the six salaried regional vice president positions which Mr. Head sought to eliminate. Mr. Head said often when head-office asked regional officials questions regarding finances they were told "to go to hell and mind their own business." In Mr. Morrisseau's view there must be accountability from top to bottom. "From my point of view economic development projects should come from the grass roots. I would like to see individuals in the communities coming forward with proposals to open stores, laundromats and other businesses. I want to see the local chairmen and regional vice-presidents supporting them in their presentations. Of course, there would have to be come screening to be sure that the projects are workable." Mr. Morrisseau says.

The availability of land for houses and local enterprises is another urgent matter on Mr. Monisseau's mind. "Our delivery system of housing through the rural and native housing program, is going pretty well. The tie- up is land. You just can't get a lot in most of the 56 communities we serve." They have never been surveyed and people have been living on land for years without holding title to he says. Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation does not approve loans where the developer does not have the title to the property. Lots are becoming available in subdivisions which Mr. Morrisseau says "cut through our. People's "pattern of life." They have always, lived more isolated by lakes

and rivers. The federation has had one person trying to deal with the land acquisition question. Mr. Morrisseau proposes a committee of two or three deal with the matter.

On the thorny issue of aboriginal rights and land claims, Mr. Morrisseau doesn't anticipate an "overnight solution." Mr. Morrisseau favors setting up a Métis land commission which would visit all the communities and inform people about the issue which is now "something in the mind of the leadership." He would also like the commission to investigate the local land situation.

Many problems

"It's a problem that has existed for a long time, I don't think it can be settled in a flash. All our people must understand it and be ready to make sacrifices to fight it in the he says. Tackling challenges is truck and trade for this lean, well-built Métis leader. He recalls the day when his father appeared at the door of the Crane River schoolhouse and asked the teacher to release his son to go winter fishing. The teacher replied, "You can have him but you'll lose the a month of family allowance." His father answered, "I think he's worth more than that to me out on the lake." At the age of 13, young Morrisseau went to work on a neighboring ranch and at 15 struck out for north country to work on railroad construction. His subsequent activities included surface mine drifting in Thompson with Foundation Company of Canada, a six year stint as a trooper with the 2nd Battalion, Prince Patricia Canadian Light Infantry, long-distance trucking, bus driving in Winnipeg and 2 and one half years with the provincial department of highways at Grand Rapids where he became chairman of the Manitoba Métis Federation local. In 1971, he ran unsuccessfully for the federation presidency against Angus Spence. There were seven candidates and Mr. Morrisseau stayed in the race until the final count. He was later vice president of The Pas region and also worked with the federal-provincial new start program. Mr. Morrisseau was later executive assistant to Northern Affairs minister Ron Mc- Bryde. He transferred to Dauphin where he was director of the Manipogo information program. He left this post last March because "financial restraints were so tight and discouraging. "He found that Mr. McBryde was a good listener but others "higher-up in northern affairs were difficult to get along with." Since April 1, Mr. Morrisseau has been back on the trapline in the Crane River area and working on the ranch. He has 20 horses and 25 head of cattle. Four of the Morrisseau's six children are boys and are "quite capable of feeding pigs, milking cows and exercising the horses." His wife Nellie is well versed in ranching and politics.

Joseph Angus Spence:

By Ida A. Spence, his niece

Joseph Angus Spence was born on July 8, 1919 at Eddystone, Manitoba, the youngest son of Joseph and Nancy Spence. He attended school at the Eddystone School District #1873. In the early 1960's he upgraded his education to a Grade 10, and he attended the Manitoba Institute of Technology in Winnipeg (now RRC) to take a meat-cutting course. He was fluent in two languages, English and Ojibway.

When still a young man at home Angus worked with his father trapping in the spring and digging seneca roots in the summer. He worked as a hired hand for area ranchers. As a young adult, he went to Winnipeg and worked for a time at a meat-packing plant.

On Sept 29, 1948, he married Antoinette Zastre. They adopted a son Donald in 1953 and a son Jackie in 1954. In 1955, their children began to arrive. They had seven children in 10 years: Kenny, Marie Rose, Roger, Glen, Gerald, Gloria, and Norma.

Angus and Antoinette began their ranch with just one cow. By 15 years they had one of the most successful ranches in the area, with 250 head of cattle. They were one of the first families in Eddystone with electricity and a television set. By 1967 Angus and Antoinette were able to purchase a brand new house from the Co-op in Ste. Rose. They were one of the first households in Eddystone with running water. His wife Antoinette wrote, "The only running water we had before then was when I ran for it."

A Pioneer - A Man of Firsts

In the mid-1960's after his ranch was well established, Angus looked around at the larger community and became concerned with how Métis people were faring. He attended the Indian and Métis annual conferences in Winnipeg. At that time the only Aboriginal organization established in Winnipeg was the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre of Winnipeg, the first of its kind in Canada, established in 1958 to help Indian and Métis families relocate to Winnipeg.

At the 1967 Indian and Métis Conference, Métis attendees including Angus Spence became frustrated because Conference agenda items did not address Métis concerns. The Métis had no voice at the Conference. At that Conference a number of Métis, including Angus, walked out to a different room, to discuss Métis concerns. From that split at the 1967 Conference the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood and the Manitoba Métis Federation were formed.

The Manitoba Métis Federation was incorporated on December 28, 1967. Rev. Adam Cuthand was appointed its first President. In 1970 the MMF had its first elections, and Angus Spence became the first elected President. He was re-elected in 1972.

Angus Spence hired Stan Fulham as Executive Director. They worked without pay for about six months until the first MMF funding came through. Angus opened the first MMF office at 301 - 374 Donald Street in Winnipeg. He hired Valerie Klyne Lamirande as Secretary. Later on, Al Chartrand became the Education Director. In 1971, Stan Fulham drafted the first MMF Constitution.

On the national level, in 1971 Angus worked with the Métis organizations from three western provinces to establish the Native Council of Canada so that there would be a national voice for the Métis people of western Canada. He was the first Secretary-Treasurer of NCC. Now since March of 1983 the Métis National Council represents the Métis of the western provinces.



In 1971, Emile Pelletier set up the Manitoba Métis Federation Press. The first book published was Stan Fulham's book "In Search of a Future" in 1972. In order to solicit First Nations' manuscripts as well as Métis manuscripts, in 1980 the MMF Press changed its name to Pemmican Publications, as it is known today.

In 1978, MMF staff were soliciting memberships at \$5 a share, to set up the Métis Credit Union. Angus Spence bought the first membership, becoming member #1. Then in the early 1980's, the Métis Credit Union, to help attract First Nations bands funds, changed its name to the Me-dian (Métis and Indian) Credit Union, as it is known today.

Angus Spence also helped the Manitoba Native Pathfinders to get started. This training and employment agency started out serving Winnipeg, Selkirk, Portage la Prairie, Brandon, and Dauphin. When it began to serve Winnipeg clients only, its name was changed to Winnipeg Native Pathfinders. In 1981 Angus was hired as an Employment Counsellor. In 1983, Winnipeg Native Pathfinders changed its name to Native Employment Services, then later on to the Aboriginal Training and Employment Services, and finally to the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD), as it is known today.

After the Manitoba Métis Federation, Winnipeg Region, was re-formed in 1982, the Winnipeg Locals appointed Angus Spence as their first Vice-President. Angus opened his office at 215 – 504 Main Street and hired Claire Riddle as Secretary. He invited all Aboriginal organizations that serve Aboriginal people in Winnipeg to his office for several networking meetings. Committees were formed from these organizations, including a Winnipeg Region Child Care Committee. This Committee, formed from many Aboriginal organizations in the City, branched out on its own and evolved, to start the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre as it is known today.

On Oct. 12, 1982, Angus was formally elected to the position of Vice-President, MMF Winnipeg Region, for one year. The next spring, he was re-elected for the two-year term 1983-85. In 1985, one hundred years after the death of Louis Riel, he assisted the Winnipeg Region Cultural Committee to start Métis Arts of Manitoba, which set up cultural activities all over the City that year to celebrate the life of Louis Riel. That year the Cultural Committee and Métis Arts of Manitoba also set up the first Métis Pavilion, Folklorama. After a busy three years as Vice-President, MMF Winnipeg Region, in 1985 Angus retired from Métis politics.

From 1966 to 1985, Angus Spence served on many boards and committees. The following is a partial list of his voluntary service on federal, provincial, private, and non-profit boards:

- Kinew Housing
- Native Alcohol Council of Manitoba
- Native Clan Organization
- Winnipeg Native Industrial Centre
- X-Kalay
- Oozawekwun Centre
- Communities Economic Development Fund
- LEAP Review Board

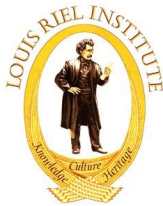


Brandon 1984 MMF Winnipeg Region Board:
Bernie Wood, Rolande Flockton, VP Angus Spence.

➤ Manitoba Human Rights
Commission

Angus Spence passed away at the Victoria Hospital on August 15, 1985, not living to see the first Métis Pavilion that August. The Indian & Métis Friendship Centre of Winnipeg inducted Angus Spence posthumously to their IMFC Wall of Honour.

Brian Orvis, who wrote Angus' eulogy, stated "Mr. Spence will be remembered by thousands of Manitobans in all walks of life as a kindly man, a friend and associate whose dedication and strong beliefs led him to move mountains on behalf of Native people. He never compromised his deep and abiding faith in what is fundamentally right and most of his life was devoted to the social and economic advancement of the Métis people."



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Métis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute