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ALFRED SANDERSON

Mr. Sanderson is a Metis from northern Saskatchewan. He was a member of the Metis Association organized by Brady and Norris.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Early attempts to organize the Metis Association.
- The informant's personal friendship with Brady and Norris.

Murray: I'm talking to Alfred Sanderson of La Ronge. Alfred, you were in La Ronge when Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris first came. Do you remember the first meeting of the Metis Association?

Alfred: Well, that I can't remember.

Murray: Do you remember being in the Metis Association?

Alfred: I remember at the meeting, but to know the year it was, I don't know the dates.

Murray: Do you remember what happened at the meeting?

Alfred: Well, didn't happen too much. But, of course, we know that we truly hear lots of promises, you know, but these promises never come true.

Murray: Who made the promises?

Alfred: Well, anyone who holds the meeting on.

Murray: Politicians?

Alfred: Yeah.

Murray: Did you know Jim Brady well?

Alfred: Oh yes, I used to travel with him a lot.

Murray: Could you tell me a bit about him? What kind of man was Jim?

Alfred: Well, he was a willing man to help anybody at all who comes around, no matter what can be done he has to always give them a lift anyway. Help them out as much as he could.

Murray: Did he help you out in things?

Alfred: Oh yes, quite a few times, yeah.

Murray: Can you remember any particular things?

Alfred: Well, we used to be out in canoes, you know, going here and there and prospecting and everything like that. So he helped me out then. I had a few days work out of him anyway. (laughs) Yes.

Murray: You worked prospecting with Jim did you?

Alfred: Oh yes, I was with him. So was Malcolm Norris.

Murray: Do you remember over the years how many people were involved in the Metis Association? Were there a lot of people involved or...?

Alfred: There were quite a few, yes, there were quite a few. But just to know how many there were, I don't know, I don't remember.

Murray: Can you remember what kinds of issues that the Metis Association was talking about? What were things that they wanted to see done?

Alfred: Well, they wanted the housing program to go ahead, see, but we haven't seen it yet. Well, they all had different, different ways. How they can fool us, eh? (laughs)

Murray: What other kinds of things besides housing did Jim talk about?

Alfred: Prospecting, something like that.

Murray: He wanted native people to go out and prospect?

Alfred: Yes, yes. But that's been going on now for some time, see, because there's quite a few natives, you know, are out prospecting.

Murray: Do you remember any other people that were involved in the first meetings of the Metis Association?

Alfred: Well, mostly the native people. There wasn't too many whites to be included in that meeting, because...

Murray: It was for Metis?

Alfred: Yeah.

Murray: Do you remember any names of people who went to some of those meetings?

Alfred: No, I don't.

Murray: Do you remember Malcolm Norris very well?

Alfred: Oh yes, I used to travel with him (inaudible) travel with him a lot, you know, by air and by boat.

Murray: Could you tell me a bit about Malcolm? What kind of person was Malcolm?

Alfred: He was a pretty nice man. He would talk for you anywhere at all, you know, even at these big meetings and conventions where I had been attending, you know. When he's at the meeting he really told the big shots what he thinks about them. "The thing that they're there for," he said, "They're not coming to tell anything. They're just grabbing everything what they have to know from you," he says. "You learning them not to mess." You seen Malcolm Norris, you know, and faced out at the meetings, unless he was a little bit too high in landing. (laughs) That's the kind of man he was.

Murray: Were these men popular with native people?

Alfred: Oh yes, they were. Well, they were half natives, the same as we are.

Murray: And everybody liked them, did they?

Alfred: Oh, yes. Yes, they did.

Murray: I'm trying to understand what the Metis Association tried to do back in the early days when it first started.

Alfred: Well, never tried to do much, you know, because

there's not too many of them that would understand what the Association means. Otherwise if they would've understood, you know, I guess they would have been a lot more included in it.

Murray: I see, so they didn't understand what Malcolm and Jim wanted them to do?

Alfred: No, they didn't quite understand. There was an odd one here and there that understand, you know, but they just didn't exactly understand it all.

Murray: Why do you think that was? What stopped them from understanding that?

Alfred: Well, there's quite a few of them, you know, that didn't understand the language, the English. And some of these like Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady, you know, they talk Cree here and there they driven (inaudible). They couldn't understand them very well. You've got to interpret for them, so they understand you. That's how they get by with us.

Murray: Do you think that native people then were prepared to fight for their own rights?

Alfred: Yes, they did.

Murray: Were they prepared more then than they are now?

Alfred: I don't know about that now. They were more prepared now than they were. Because they didn't exactly fully understood what was settled, talked about.

Murray: Were Malcolm and Jim the first native people to come to you and say, "You should be fighting for your rights"?

Alfred: Yes. Malcolm Norris was. Jim Brady came a little after, maybe a year after Malcolm.

Murray: But before that time you can't remember anyone trying to organize the Metis people, eh?

Alfred: No, no I don't.

Murray: These were the first men?

Alfred: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: What happened before then if people needed help? Were there any leaders then that would help?

Alfred: Well, the chiefs from the Indian band, you know. They're just about the only ones that tried to help the Metis people around here, since I could remember.

Murray: Before Jim and Malcolm, eh, it was the chiefs?

Alfred: Before Jim and Malcolm were here.

Murray: So that the treaty Indian chiefs would help the Metis people as well, eh?

Alfred: Yes, yes. And that's the, I think be forgotten now. Them days it wasn't forgotten. But nowadays, you know, everything new.

Murray: Right. The Metis and Indian aren't on the same reserve now, are they?

Alfred: No, no they don't.

Murray: Are you a treaty Indian?

Alfred: No I'm not.

Murray: You're Metis?

Alfred: Yeah. I'm not a white man. (laughs) As I was saying, you know, at least I've said it lots of times, I guess I'm about the oldest man now, in La Ronge. I'm seventy-six years of age. So I'm still here, but getting pretty weak now. (laughs) I've got to be riding wherever I go.

Murray: Do you remember any stories about Malcolm or Jim that stick in your mind, that would be interesting?

Alfred: Well, I'll tell you this much. See, Malcolm Norris was a trapper, and he was a round man, I might say. He was a fisherman, he was in school, he was still in school, and he passed all grades. He passed university. You see, he knowed something all right. And Jim was just about the same. Jim Brady was just about the same. They knowed something, not like me. (laughs)

Murray: They were educated men?

Alfred: Oh yes, they were.

Murray: Do you remember any times that they were fighting for a native person who was having a hard time? Do you remember any particular stories?

Alfred: Yes, but this I don't see, you know. But Jim Brady was in Cumberland for a long time. That's where he was fire engine or fire patrol or something like that. And that's where he was, you know. At the time these whites used to be down there, hired men, of course. But Jim Brady was telling us one time that there was two guys that were after a man, you know, and they were going to fight on him, the two of them. And Jim stood for the man, and he knocked the shit out of those two whites. That's what kind of a man he was.

Murray: He was a strong man, too.

Alfred: He was a strong man, he could handle his fists pretty good. But Malcolm Norris, he never tell us them kind of stories, you know. He was kind of a funny man, you see, very (inaudible) and everything. He used to make people laugh, you know, and he was that kind of a man, but he didn't hate nobody though. He liked all kinds of people, that's the kind of man he was. He was a pretty nice man.

Murray: Did he ever get angry with native people because they didn't understand him?

Alfred: No, never was. But he always find somebody to interpret for him, to make them understand. But lots of people were foolish, you know, they didn't understand enough. They understand here and there, just a few words here and there, so they couldn't quite fully understand what was said about, and what's been talked about.

Murray: Do you think people were a little bit afraid of the ideas that Malcolm talked about?

Alfred: No, I don't think so, I couldn't see it.

Murray: But they just didn't understand?

Alfred: Yeah, just they didn't understand. There's some that had experience what's been talked about, you know, and they were, since they understand here and there but they didn't right away quite fully understood. That was the sticker at the time.

Murray: In 1964-65, were people understanding Malcolm and Jim better then?

Alfred: Oh, yes. Yes.

Murray: What kind of things happened then?

Alfred: Well, they are about the same as it is now.

Murray: Did people look to the Metis Society then as an organization that would help native people?

Alfred: Well, just about getting on to it, just about getting on to it.

Murray: Just starting then, eh?

Alfred: Just starting then.

Murray: And this was in the 60s?

Alfred: Yes and these two guys were, they were gone then. I think they were all underground at the time they start to get to understanding.

Murray: So they were dead before it really started happening, eh?

Alfred: Yes, yes. Before we really got organized, you know, what they'd been talking about. As for me, you know, I was Grade 2 when I left school, and I only picked it up in the bush, what I can talk, what I can write. That's the only piece that I learn't you know. I was Grade 2 when I left school. But that's as far as I went. I didn't know from yes or no, to tell you the truth - that's the fact, now. That's no lie.

Murray: Of course, there's more to know than just the schooling, of course.

Alfred: Yes, yes that's it.

Murray: You know the bush.

Alfred: Quite a bit. (laughs)

Murray: I've been to school, but I don't know the bush.

Alfred: I bet you. Well, we often see that these white people are, they are green and we're green too. But we're not green in the bush, but they are though (laughs).

Murray: Right.

Alfred: But what they do now, doing this and that you know. I have a son that's been coming up, I don't know they're that green, anyway.

Murray: Can you think of anything else about the two men that you would like to say?

Alfred: Well, I'll tell you about them. I think Norris - who in the hell did die first? I believe Jim Brady did.

Murray: He disappeared, yeah.

Alfred: He disappeared, yeah, in the bush. And he had one native, an Indian at that. See, they were prospecting when finally we heard that they were missing. So the planes went over there and started hunting but they couldn't find nothing, they couldn't trace nothing at all. What happened to them? And so right today nobody knows yet how they disappeared.

And Malcolm Norris, I'd been with him in the plane, staking claims all over and prospecting. We never got missed anyways. (laughs) We always found our home. We used to have some pretty long trips, by plane, of course. Of course, I done it in the waterways too, in my young days, but not now. I think I'd start to forget it now. (laughs)

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