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JOE AMYOTTE

Joe Amyotte was president of the southern Saskatchewan Metis organization (Metis Society of Saskatchewan) from 1966. In 1967, when it amalgamated with the northern group (Metis Association of Saskatchewan) Mr. Amyotte became president of the combined organization until 1970 when he was defeated by Howard Adams. Since that time he has had no further association with the group. He was responsible for the development of educational upgrading and housing programs for the Metis.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- The rebirth of the Metis Society of Saskatchewan (southern) in the 1960s.
- Relations with the northern group (Metis Association).
- Educational upgrading and housing programs for Metis.
- Malcolm Norris, president of the Metis Association, and his attitudes to government aid.
- Amalgamation of the two groups and the internal politics of the combined organization.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Joe Amyotte is a southern Metis who was instrumental in organizing the Metis Society of Saskatchewan (in the southern part of the province) in 1962-64. There was little, if any, contact between this group and the northern one under Malcolm Norris until 1967 when the two organizations merged. Norris opposed the merger on the grounds that the MSS was too closely tied to the Liberal Party and the Liberal government. He also opposed it because the organization was receiving government grants. Amyotte became the president of the organization and

retained that position until 1969 when Howard Adams won the presidency.

INTERVIEW:

Murray Dobbin: I am speaking to Joe Amyotte of Regina who was the first president of the Southern Metis Society. I think that's right isn't it, Mr. Amyotte?

Joe Amyotte: That's right, correct.

Murray: Could you tell me a bit about that organization, when it first started and the reasons for it and where it happened, those kind of details? Just sort of how and why it got started.

Joe: Well, that had been started away back in 1930s, that organization. But it died down in the 1950s, the beginning of the 1950s. I think the last meeting they had was in 1952 and then it died down in the south but the north still had it. They had Malcolm Norris. He was the president of what they called the Metis Association at that time. But we didn't have none in here. So how I got involved with it in here is when I was all crippled up. I couldn't work no more. I had my pension, my war pension money, so I had lots of time to visit the people and we started it up. We were going to join the north but for some reason they didn't want us to join the north; so we couldn't join the Metis Association.

Murray: What year was that that you started it up again? You mentioned that you couldn't work any more and you started going around.

Joe: We started it up in 1962. But I wasn't the president then, I was only on the board of directors. It laid in there for four years and it was in 1966 when I took over, when I was elected president. And this is when I started. That's when I started. I called it the Metis Society of Saskatchewan.

Murray: And that's the name it had right up until last year isn't it?

Joe: Yes, well it is supposed to be yet. I don't know whether they changed it or not. But anyway, that was the name of it. I went up to the registration. I was going to reopen the old one but it was so much mixed up in it and I was advised if I was to start a new one it would be a lot easier. It would be a lot simpler to go ahead with than to try to survive the old one. So I took over and started the new one.

Murray: This was in 1962?

Joe: No, that was in - we started in 1962 but I...

Murray: You didn't have a constitution then?

Joe: No, we didn't have - well, we had some kind of

constitution but it wasn't holding anything. But in 1966, that's when I made the constitution that would stand up to be registered.

Murray: And what you had planned to do was to revive the one that you said sort of died in around 1952, is that right?

Joe: Yes, but it wasn't worth reviving it so I started the other one in there.

Murray: Where did that, those first meetings take place in 1962 that you were involved in?

Joe: They were, well, we had them all over. We had mostly in private houses.

Murray: What towns and cities?

Joe: Well, we had it in Regina. We started in Regina here first.

Murray: You started in here.

Joe: Yes, we started in Regina. Well, see actually I was not the first president of the Metis Society of Saskatchewan.

Murray: But you were involved from the beginning.

Joe: But I was involved in the beginning, yes. I kind of directed how to go about it, how to run the organization. I was involved in it.

Murray: You were an organization man then sort of were you?

Joe: Yes, until 1966 when I was voted in as the president and this is where I revived it.

Murray: In 1962 did it, how many places did it take in? Did it just stay in Regina for quite a while or did it get beyond Regina as well?

Joe: Well, it stayed pretty well all in Regina. Well, they did travel a few places but we had no local whatsoever until 1966 when we started to have the locals.

Murray: I see...

Joe: As a matter of fact, I still have my records where we began to start the locals.

Murray: So it was really 1966 that it started to take off?

Joe: It started to take off, yes. See, I was only three and a half years as a president. See now, from 1966 to 1969.

Murray: When it was in Regina, can you describe some of the activities that you were, that the society was involved in? Were there regular meetings and that kind of thing?

Joe: Well yes, there were regular meetings but we had quite a problem to convince the people what our aims was, to follow us. And we had quite a few meetings but we had very poor turnout and some good turnouts; it just depends.

Murray: Why do you think people were slow to recognize the value of the organization?

Joe: Well, I think the reason why they didn't recognize the value of it because the other one, they went so high up with it and all of a sudden it died down and they kind of gave up on organizing again until I started it up again.

Murray: So is it fair to say there was quite a bit of frustration with it in the beginning?

Joe: Oh yes, there was lots of it. When I started I travelled on my own money and besides what we make like from the local. See, our first local, it was in Qu'Appelle, Local #1. This is where actually it picked up from.

Murray: This was what year then?

Joe: This was in 1966.

Murray: 1966. That was your first local outside of Regina was it?

Joe: Outside of Regina, that's right. That was my first.

Murray: And you went there to organize did you?

Joe: Yes, well I moved there from here. I moved there after I couldn't work no longer and then I went around and organized from there.

Murray: What were some of the other towns that you organized after Qu'Appelle?

Joe: (Break in tape)... and we revive our constitutions every year when I was the president. Anything to be taken off was taken off and to add to it was...

Murray: So each year you would talk about the constitution?

Joe: We used to talk about the constitution. This is all about it here. It's all here. How we run it and how, what the board of directors, what a president's job was, what the board of directors' job was, the executives and all that in here. So they are all in here.

Murray: Right, well, I'll have a look at that. When this was first being organized in 1966, when you were elected president, the funds for the organization were just from the people themselves who bought memberships and that sort of thing, eh?

Joe: Yes, it was just from the membership and then we had a few card games and bingos and....

Murray: To raise money?

Joe: To raise - we run that for two years. You see, I was a board of director for a year and we raised the fund when I was a board of director. Well, I was elected as a president on Local #1. I was the president for that Local #1 at the time.

Murray: At Qu'Appelle?

Joe: At Qu'Appelle. So we raised some of the funds from there and when I got elected as the provincial, then we used that fund for me for travelling and whatever it is.

Murray: And this is how you went around to other places to organize locals as well, eh?

Joe: That's right.

Murray: How hard was it to organize those locals in the small places?

Joe: Very hard. It was very, very hard.

Murray: Could you describe that a bit, what the difficulties were?

Joe: Yes, I can. To organize people at the time, I had to make [in] many places, four or five trips. I'd have four or five different meetings to make them understand what was my reason for organizing. Of course, I had to have my objectives and you see, I wanted them to have a better education, better job, better pay, better housing, and better security jobs. This was my objects for organizing.

Murray: Better living standards in general, eh?

Joe: Living standards, yes. I wanted to bring my people to live the same as, to live the standards...

Murray: To live like other Canadians I guess, eh?

Joe: Yes, the same as them. Instead they were pushed behind.

Murray: Were people conscious of the fact that they were pushed behind, as you say?

Joe: Yes, they did but still they were scared. They were very scared to join the organization because they didn't know what they were going to run into. They figured it was just going to be another laughing stock for them, you see. And then this is what I had to face.

Murray: Do you think that they had been laughed at before? Is

that what they were afraid of?

Joe: Well yes. When the other organization fell, when it went down the drain I would say, they were kind of let down. Of course they weren't looked after after that. "Well they can't do it anyways so what's the use trying it again." But then I came along and I survived it and I made it as strong as it is today. As far as I was concerned this is where it come up to.

Murray: So it was a matter of just going back and back and back and back?

Joe: Yeah, going back and forth and bring some more and I had a meeting every month. And feel them around and see what we can get and what we can't get and then I finally started to get the grant. My first grant was \$500.

Murray: What year would that have been?

Joe: That would be in 1966.

Murray: 1966.

Joe: Yes, I got my records in here too for that.

Murray: Right, right. And that money was given to you by the government for organizing, for you to organize?

Joe: Just for organizing, that's all I had to. That was for one year. Besides I had to raise money for ourselves like, you know, to travel with.

Murray: So after you went back to these communities several times, people started to respond more positively, did they?

Joe: Yes, well, they didn't respond until I started upgrading, when I started the upgrading. This is where I started to respond to the people.

Murray: Could you describe the upgrading a bit? What did that involve?

Joe: Well, my first object was, when I met the government, it was for to upgrade my people. This is what I was after.

Murray: Educationally?

Joe: Education. Because a lot of people, they didn't have no education. They couldn't read or write, the same as I was, you know. And some of them had grade four or grade five education and it wasn't enough for them to have a job or to go take a good job to make a good living off of it. And when I first got the upgrading, I only got one school. That was in 1966. I got it..(tape malfunction). ...first got the grant. It was in 1965, yes. That's when I first got the grant. That's when I started. Well, they gave me one school in 1966.

Murray: For upgrading.

Joe: For upgrading. That was from grade five to grade eight.

Murray: Where was that school, in Regina?

Joe: No, I had that in Qu'Appelle. That's where I was; that was my home town there. That's where I lived at the time. This is where I started from.

Murray: And you were just local president then, you weren't...

Joe: No, I was the provincial then.

Murray: You were, in 1965?

Joe: Yes, this is how I got the grant you see, and after I got it, yet. Well, when I started upgrading I had quite a time too. Because when I first started upgrading I only had fifteen students and to make up more, I had to take white people to come in there. I had two white people in there, to make up seventeen.

Murray: You had to have that many for them to operate that course?

Joe: I had to have them to get off on my course, yes. So I started that and then when they were getting paid for going and upgrading and this is what encouraged them to start to join my organization. But I had a good success with my upgrading. I started with seventeen and I wound up with nineteen students. When I started, the government, they gave me seventeen and they said I would be lucky if I had ten left by the time I finished; but I had more.

Murray: So the people really saw that as an important service?

Joe: Yes, it was important. And then I got more and more and more after that.

Murray: Were there more schools opened after that?

Joe: Oh yes, I had all over school open. When I got defeated I had about 35 schools going. Well, I had 265 students going to school in 1969, 1968 and 1969.

Murray: And that was in the southern part of the province, eh?

Joe: No, that was all over, all over. Green Lake, Beauval, Lac La Ronge. I think they had one in La Loche too.

Murray: And before this one that you got started in Qu'Appelle, there was no such thing for native people?

Joe: No, not for native, not for Metis people. But they had one in Broadview, what they call the Indian and Metis upgrading. But they had theirs going for about six or seven

years before ours.

Murray: I see. But that was the only one that you knew of?

Joe: That was the only one we knew. Some, maybe three or four Metis people would go to that one but that's from just around wherever they were there.

Murray: And this was run by the government as well?

Joe: It was run by the government as well, yes.

Murray: What were some of the other programs that the Metis Society, when you were active in it, was putting forward?

Joe: The programs I put in there? Well, I had sewing classes going, and then there was the housing project. I had the housing project then.

Murray: Was that the house building that you were...?

Joe: Yes, oh yes.

Murray: The Metis people were building their own houses were they?

Joe: Well, no, they were put up for them but it was put from the government. Yes, see, I built fifteen houses in Lac La Ronge and I had built fifteen houses in Green Lake and, I'll have to pretty well look in my book to see...

Murray: That's okay, I'm just trying to get an impression. What year would that have been that the houses were being built?

Joe: Well, they were started building in... I've got it all here. When they first started building.

Murray: Would it have been about the same time as the upgrading?

Joe: Yes, they were starting to build the houses in 1966. In 1966, that's when they started building the houses. In 1966, 1967, and 1968. And I had low rental houses in there; everything was low rental of course. We put up the houses according to their wages. See, at that time I had the houses rented was up to \$13 a month for Metis people.

Murray: That's really good.

Joe: Yeah, from \$45 to \$13 a month.

Murray: So the maximum was \$45?

Joe: Yes. You see, at that time when I worked on there, the federal paid 75%, the provincial paid 20% and ARDA, they would



give up 5%.

Murray: Aside from the programs you mentioned, like housing and upgrading, what were the activities of the Metis Society? Did you see it as an organization that was sort of giving Metis people a collective voice? Was that something that you tried to do as well?

Joe: Well, yes. This is something which I was really fanatastic(?) of it to get into it. Because you see, we never did have a voice. And we never had a voice in the government or anywhere.

Murray: You were always spread out all over the place.

Joe: We were all spread out and furthermore, if one would go and ask for something, well, he was just turned down because we never had a voice. And to have a voice we had to organize. And to organize we had to have enough members to have a voice in the government.

Murray: When you were ... go ahead, I interrupted you. Were you going to say something?

Joe: Well, you see in 1966 and 1967 then we had a voice in the government and then we could talk.

Murray: They listened to you then?

Joe: They listened to us then. Although, from the time I started till I was defeated, that's something. I never was turned down from the government for anything. Anything I asked, I got it. Of course, I never went in a big way like they did now. At that time I went - I started from one step at a time.

And I accepted everybody in my schools too. This was something that was really backing me up. The government backed me up so much because I took white people in there, Indians in there, Metis; I mixed them up. I figured well, what's good for one is good for everybody else. And that's how I organized it.

Murray: When you were out organizing the Metis locals and the one in Regina, did you find that the Metis people had a consciousness of being Metis people or was that strong in their minds do you think?

Joe: Well, yes, they had a consciousness because lots of times they told me, "Well, who are we anyway to do anything like that? Who are we to get anything from them? We'll never get anything out of them. That's just a waste of time." That's what I used to get told. But when I stood there to bring in a little bit and show them that I can get something through the government, and then when the grants started to come in, then they were really interested then.

Murray: Do you think there was a pride among the people that you tried or organize, a pride in their native background?

Joe: No, I don't think they were. There wasn't a pride. I think they were more - well, they were more scared than anything else. They were pushed so far back, you know, they were scared to come ahead, to come forward, to present themselves. We are just as good as the next one.

Murray: They were taught that they weren't as good all the time.

Joe: Yes, all this time, yes. This is what it is.

Murray: You think they began to believe that after a while, eh?

Joe: Yeah, well this is it. After, when I got them going then they started...

Murray: Fighting back.

Joe: They started fighting back then and then they started to show up more and come out, come forward.

Murray: Did all kinds of people respond to you, older people and younger people or was there, was it more the younger people?

Joe: No, they would all respond to me, old people, young people. As a matter of fact the old people, they would more respond than I did with the young people, until I got them interested with upgrading and all that and got them better jobs and better housing.

Murray: Were there any particular areas in the province that you got really good response?

Joe: Yes. I got a good response, well I got a good response as far as organizing pretty well right through from the south to the north in there. From the government I had good response from the north when I took up the housing project in the north there, when I showed them how the people were living down there. And I even brought pictures from there and showed them how bad they were in there and I even travelled with them down to the north there.

Murray: Which government? Was that both governments, the CCF and the Liberals?

Joe: No, well, it was the Liberals at that time.

Murray: That was after 1964 then?

Joe: Yes, that was after the Liberals were in but to me it didn't matter because I dealt with all of them. I dealt with both sides.

Murray: Had you approached the CCF/NDP government before that about these problems?

Joe: No, because at that time I wasn't - well, I don't, I was...

Murray: You were working I suppose at that time.

Joe: I was working at the time and then whenever I had the time I went to a meeting. I had to make a living and...

Murray: So you weren't a full-time organizer at all.

Joe: No, well, not until I got crippled up and I couldn't work and then this is where I took interest, in there. But I imagine I could have got just as good a response either side because I was a man that I deal with both sides; didn't matter who it was.

Murray: I want to go back a bit now before I forget. What can you tell me about that organization that you mentioned

started in 1930s and sort of petered out in the early 1950s? Do you know very much detail about that organization?

Joe: No, I don't know very much although I was a president of a local in Balcarres at that time but I didn't know much about it myself. That time I was only young myself and in there, but all I know that they got was a little bit of land here and there and...

Murray: What year would that have been?

Joe: Oh, that was way back in the 1930s. I imagine it would be around 1933 or 1935 or something, within them years anyway.

Murray: Do you remember who the president of that organization was?

Joe: No, I don't, I don't remember. There were so many of them in there, I don't remember. I was only one convention at that time when they had that.

Murray: Where was that convention held?

Joe: It was held in the courthouse in Regina, in here that time. That was the old courthouse.

Murray: That would have been in the 1930s sometime.

Joe: Oh yeah, way back in the 1930s, yes.

Murray: Would they have held a convention every year in those days do you think?

Joe: Yes, I think they did. I think they did. Then the war came along and then they kind of died out. And then when they did come back half of them didn't want to join and then it kind

of broke down and it all went to pieces.

Murray: Was there anything after the war at all or did it really stop with the war?

Joe: Oh yes, well it was up till the 1950s.

Murray: So it was active right up until the 1950s?

Joe: I think it was either 1951 or 1952. I did see that when they registered themselves the last time in the registration here. When I went digging for the constitutions and the bylaws and see what they had in there. And that's when I was told

that they were going to - well, as a matter of fact, it was no good anyway, to start it. It was too badly misused. Otherwise I'll say, being misused. See, that's the same, the one that Malcolm Norris had, that Metis Association of Saskatchewan. But, well, they kept on going. I imagine they kept on going because they had it for a long time but they never got nowhere with it.

Murray: I understood from what I've studied, and I could quite easily be wrong here, is that Malcolm didn't really start it going until 1964.

Joe: Yeah.

Murray: As far as travelling around and that sort of thing. Because he worked for the government up until that time and probably - like when you were working - didn't have time.

Joe: Yeah, probably.

Murray: But you think it was active until the 1950s and then between the early 1950s and the middle 1960s, it was dead.

Joe: I think so. I think so. I think that is what happened in there. Well, when I started to travel in 1965 and 1966, and I met Malcolm Norris once or twice, he was a very smart man but he was a very independent man. He didn't believe anything to start it or to get a grant from the government. He wanted to do it on his own and they didn't have the money to start off with anything. And this is how it was sitting in there. They couldn't get nowhere with it. Although they had pretty good members, you know, they had a lot of members. They had more members than I had.

Murray: And this was without any government money?

Joe: Yes.

Murray: Did you have many discussions with Malcolm about that, about taking government grants?

Joe: Yes, he said he didn't believe on that.

Murray: Did he explain why?

Joe: Yeah, he said if we couldn't make it go ourselves, no use. "Don't cry to the government." This is what he used to tell me.

Murray: Did he ever say that he thought the organization might be corrupted if it took government money, was that...?

Joe: I don't know. He was a guy that he didn't tell you too much, you know. Especially, like he was the president of the north and I was the president of the south. And he didn't want to say too much at me.

Murray: Do you think he saw you as competition?

Joe: Well, this is what I thought, yes. I thought he thought I was the competition with him.

Murray: How did that strike you? As being sort of strange?

Joe: No, it didn't bother me. We had our dividing line in here and we figured well, we are in the south and we'll do what we can and if we can't make it go that's fine and dandy.

Murray: Where was the dividing line? How did that work?

Joe: Well, we figured about Saskatoon, the CN line was the dividing line.

Murray: So you would have Saskatoon and then everything north of that was the northern association?

Joe: Yes.

Murray: Did you have a local in Saskatoon at that time?

Joe: No, not at that time. Because I never travelled - I never travelled the north until when we amalgamated with the north. And that took quite a persuasion to do too.

Murray: What year did it amalgamate?

Joe: I think it was in 1967.

Murray: So at that time Malcolm was quite ill I guess, wasn't he?

Joe: Yes, well, that's how we amalgamated. Otherwise I don't think I ever would have got it if Malcolm wasn't, if he wasn't ill. I think he would have...

Murray: If he wasn't ill?

Joe: Yes. All of the people were starting to come my way when I had meetings in there and see that we were getting grants and

all of that and they couldn't get any.

Murray: Was that one of the reasons that he opposed joining with your organization was the whole thing about grants?

Joe: Yes. I think so. I think that's what it was because he didn't want no part of it.

Murray: Was there ever a time when you talked to him that he thought it was a good idea and then changed his mind?

Joe: No, not at any time I saw him.

Murray: He never wanted to join the two organizations?

Joe: No.

Murray: Did he...

Joe: He wanted us to join them.

Murray: He wanted you to join him but he didn't want to join you?

Joe: Yeah, that was it.

Murray: So from your point of view, he seemed to want to be the chief man in this organization?

Joe: Yeah. Because after we amalgamated, I got the most of his papers where he had resolutions passed through the meetings to go to the government and none of them went to the government at all. They were all dead in there and he just kept them. Mine, I took them in there and I had them stamped. Every resolution that I went to a meeting, I took them to the government and I got the government to stamp them and I returned the copy to my local to see that I fought for them.

Murray: Right. Do you still have those papers of Malcolm's?

Joe: No, no, I left them over there in Prince Albert.

Murray: Who would have had those?

Joe: Well, that little Robson over there.

Murray: Who was that now?

Joe: Robson his name was, I just - Jim Robson, I think?

Murray: Was he in the Association?

Joe: Oh yes, he was.

Murray: Jimmy Robson, eh?

Joe: Yeah, well, Jimmy Robson and I guess you know the

Gallineaus(?) over there. They were in the Association.

Murray: I don't think so, no.

Joe: And Rod Bishop and all them.

Murray: I know Rod, I know Rod.

Joe: You see, Rod, he was the president after, when Malcolm was ill. And I used to sit in with Rod and Rod thought it was a good thing when I started getting grants, you know. Then they started. This is how they amalgamated with us then. When they seen that we were getting grants and they couldn't get nothing.

Murray: So you think it was mostly Malcolm's influence that the northern association didn't get grants?

Joe: Yes.

Murray: Once Malcolm became too ill to run the organization, people started deciding that it was a good thing to get in.

Joe: Yes, well they thought it was a good thing because I explained to them why I was doing it and the reason why and I wanted my people to come up to class too as well as anybody else. I want them to come halfway down the road anyway, not just to sit back. And when they seen that, then they sort of came my way.

Murray: When did you first start talking about the amalgamation, when did those discussions first start taking place and when did you first think about it?

Joe: Well, the first meeting I had down there, Malcolm Norris was there. I couldn't very well discuss anything like that but I discussed my problems in here. I discussed what I was going to do, what I was after.

Murray: With the southern organization?

Joe: With the southern organization. And I discussed that I was going to get a grant, I was going to fight for the grant, because I didn't know I was going to get the grant at the time but I told them that I was going to fight for grants and see if we can get new housing and all that...

(End of Side A)

(Side B)

Joe: So we phoned them one night. They were having a big meeting down there. We phoned them.

Murray: Where was that, in P.A.?

Joe: P.A. And we were having a meeting at the same time and they had two days, a two-day convention. So we phoned them in there and they wouldn't accept us unless we joined them thirteen members. We had to join the Metis Association and I think this is where we fall out. We wanted to go and see what kind of an organization he had. This is what we were going to do. But when he wanted us to join without... they wouldn't let us in unless if we joined the members. And then this is when we broke away from them.

Murray: I see, so you expressed an interest in sort of talking to each other, and his message was that all the members of the southern association would have to join and buy memberships in his northern organization or there was no deal?

Joe: No deal. That's what it was.

Murray: And that was the message he actually gave you on the phone then, eh?

Joe: Yeah, that's the message he gave us on the phone, yes.

Murray: I'm trying to get a feeling for whether he was friendly or unfriendly in that conversation.

Joe: (chuckles) It was pretty hard to figure him out. I still say he was unfriendly for the south as far as I was concerned.

Murray: I wonder why that was. Have you tried to figure that out? Why would he be like that?

Joe: I don't know. And it seems he wanted to keep the north for himself and he didn't want the south to be in his organization.

Murray: Had you talked enough that he might have disagreed with something you said?

Joe: No, this was something that Malcolm Norris. If I did talk to him, it would be maybe about five or ten minutes at a time. That's the only time he ever spared his time with me. I met him in Calgary in a convention where I was invited there. That was in 1965; that's when I was first elected as a president at that time. And that was just a short year for me.

Murray: You were invited as the president of the Saskatchewan?

Joe: Of Saskatchewan, yes. Of the Metis Society of Saskatchewan. I was invited.

Murray: And he was invited as the president of the north?

Joe: The north, yes. Well, we were invited through the FSI in there to join them there. So we were there. I was there four days but any time I talked to him in there he had no interest in me so...



Murray: He cut it short.

Joe: He cut me off short.

Murray: So it wasn't that he disagreed with you. Did it seem that he didn't think you were important or not worth talking to? What do you think was...?

Joe: Well, this is what I thought. This is what I thought, yes. With me it didn't matter because I was a man that I was after one thing and I was determined to go through what I wanted to go through.

Murray: Whether Malcolm liked it or not?

Joe: Whether Malcolm Norris invited me or not.

Murray: Can you describe the conference a bit in Calgary? What was it? Was it Indian people and Metis people?

Joe: Yeah, well, it was strictly for Indian but we were invited to...

Murray: Observers?

Joe: Observers in there. This is where I learned most of my organization too, when I went there. And we exchanged all the convention papers in there and I got a bunch of it and this is where it gave me a lot of my ideas to go ahead with it.

Murray: There was a lot of talking about organization and how to do that?

Joe: Yes. And then we got, I got the feelings from there that, well, I use lots of their stuff and they use lots of my stuff, whatever we were discussing.

Murray: It was a cooperative sort of effort?

Joe: Yes. So I got along pretty good with them. So I had no problem at all.

Murray: Was that the first time you had met Malcolm?

Joe: No, I met him before that. That was before he turned us down; that was when we first started. That was in 1964.

Murray: That's right, 1964 was that phone call you made to him.

Joe: Yes.

Murray: What was the next time you talked to Malcolm after that phone call where he turned you down?

Joe: That was in Calgary at the convention.

Murray: So that was the next time?

Joe: The next time, yes. And the next time I met him when I was invited to go to the Prince Albert convention there.

Murray: Did he invite you or was that...?

Joe: No, Rod Bishop.

Murray: Bishop invited you?

Joe: Yes.

Murray: And that would have been in 1966 or...?

Joe: In 1966 I think, yes. Because I have my speech in there. Well, Howard Adams was there too. And I had my speech in there that night too. Of course I couldn't say too much. I had to kind of side in with them because it was his meeting so I couldn't very well undercut him when I was invited.

Murray: When you were a guest sort of thing.

Joe: Yes, well I was just a guest there.

Murray: But do you think that if it had been up to Malcolm, would you have been invited? If Rod hadn't invited you?

Joe: I don't think so. I don't think I would have been invited. But in the way I was invited, it was Rod Bishop he was the president then. This is how I got invited.

Murray: He was the local president or the president of the whole north?

Joe: Yes, he handed over to Rod Bishop. See, Rod Bishop was the north president of the provincial when we amalgamated, see.

Murray: Oh, I see. He was the first president then, Rod?

Joe: Yeah, after Malcolm.

Murray: That was before...

Joe: That was after Malcolm, yes.

Murray: And then when they amalgamated, you were the first president?

Joe: Yeah, I was the first president.

Murray: He had handed over to Rod because he was too sick to do it, is that right?

Joe: That's right. That's what I understood anyway. But I had

quite a few trips down there. I had to make quite a few trips before we amalgamated.

Murray: What else can you tell me about Malcolm as you knew him? What kind of man was he?

Joe: Do you know, I couldn't tell you too much about him because I didn't know him that well.

Murray: He wouldn't let you get to know him?

Joe: All I knew of Malcolm, he was a man that was independent. He didn't want no help from nobody. He wanted to run the organization himself and whatever he wanted to do, he wanted

to do it. He didn't want to go the government, he didn't want nothing. If he couldn't make it go with his people, himself, he didn't want nothing. This is how I know about him.

Murray: But as far as you know, did he seem to have the same sorts of goals for native people that you had? As far as you could see?

Joe: Well, yes, except that he didn't want to fight for it.

Murray: Or fought in a different way.

Joe: Yeah, either that or he fought a different way but he had all the same objects as I had, you know. Objectives and all that, you know. But he never used them. Which I used them.

Murray: Through the government?

Joe: Through the government.

Murray: Would he have gone the same way as you in terms of getting housing programs and those kind of programs, or was he more interested in just building the organization do you think?

Joe: I think he was just more interested in building the organization. If he couldn't do anything on his own, I don't think he would have ever done anything else.

Murray: I'm sort of asking you to guess here, I suppose, because it's hard for you to know if you didn't talk to him that much, but do you think that his goal was to build the organization and get it very strong and then when the organization was strong, put pressure on the government? Do you think maybe that's what he was going to do?

Joe: No, I don't think he was in for that. I think what he wanted to do, he wanted to get enough membership so he can start maybe build a house here, maybe here, you know, through the Metis people, without any government grant.

Murray: So it wasn't just that he didn't want the organization to have government money, he didn't want any kind of government

money at all.

Joe: No, no, he didn't want any part of it. I know that. He didn't want any part of it. And he wasn't the guy, he wouldn't

go across the street to go and ask to join him neither. Because I heard him say in the meeting there, "I wouldn't go across the street to ask them to join, if they don't want to join me they don't have to."

Murray: And he was referring to you and your organization?

Joe: Well, this is what I took for granted that is what he was referring to. So I says well, in my point of view, I says, "Well I don't think I should have to go neither. But with my part I'm going to cross the street to go to get my organization going."

Murray: Right.

Joe: Regardless what happens, I'm going.

Murray: How did you feel about that kind of comment? Did you feel insulted by it or...?

Joe: No, it didn't bother me. It didn't bother me whatsoever because I was just starting it and I...

Murray: You were pretty loose and pretty calm?

Joe: Pretty calm and I watched what I was saying. I didn't want to say too much in the meetings.

Murray: Didn't want to get him mad, I suppose.

Joe: Yes, and I wanted to make sure that I was in the right track before I get too far up. I didn't want to get myself into trouble. I had to clear out the trouble. I didn't want to get myself into something that I couldn't get out of. So I had to make sure that I was clear in there. The same with the constitution. The constitution, I draw the constitution myself. It took me three months. I had outside help, of course. I went to a judge, I went to a lawyer. I wanted to make sure my constitution didn't lead me to trouble.

Murray: Who was the lawyer you spoke to, do you remember?

Joe: Well, I had a lawyer from Qu'Appelle there, an old lawyer that was a good friend of mine and he was a J.P. at the same time, a judge, you know.

Murray: So he could tell you what was right and what was wrong.

Joe: When I draw my constitution, after I finished, before I took it into the people, he read my constitution and he made a few changes and says, "Well, this is going to cause you a little

trouble. We'll put it this way."

Murray: So he just sort of corrected the trouble spots?

Joe: Corrected for me the trouble spots. And then after I had that and then I took it into the convention and we read it clause for clause right through there. We had sixteen clauses in it.

Murray: And the people voted on it?

Joe: People voted on it and after they voted on it, I took it into the registration and I got it registered.

Murray: Was Malcolm's organization ever registered as far as you know?

Joe: As far as I know, I don't know. I couldn't tell you about that.

Murray: You don't know if they had a constitution or not?

Joe: Well, they had a constitution alright but... I did have that old constitution but when I left that office, I left lots of my records in there. But our constitution, we had a good constitution that holds water. There was no way that we could get ourself into trouble running it.

Murray: Could you tell me a bit about the final negotiations for amalgamation? Who were you actually talking to? It wasn't Malcolm because he...

Joe: No, it was - me and Rod Bishop, we were the two persons. We talked it over and then we, at a meeting, we had a couple of meetings before we amalgamated.

Murray: Was that in Prince Albert?

Joe: In Prince Albert. We had it in the friendship centre and I done my speeches in there. I told them why we should get together in there and the reason why I wanted to amalgamate with them in there. If they wanted to join my organization, it was fine then. But I figured if we can get the north and the south together, we'll have a better voice.

Murray: Instead of being divided.

Joe: Instead of being divided in that organization. And then already I was getting the grants in here. My next grant was \$16,000 and I think they kind of fall for that in the north as well. Then they were getting houses in there and started getting houses going.

Murray: They started seeing the benefits of the grants.

Joe: Yes. That's why I was fighting for it. But we had quite

a bit of problems to start off with.

Murray: How did it come about that you were president of the amalgamated organization? Was there an election between the two groups then?

Joe: Yes, we had a convention down there.

Murray: That was in Prince Albert?

Joe: That was in Prince Albert and I was elected.

Murray: People from the south and the north came to it?

Joe: From the south and the north. We invited the north and south and we hold our convention from here, down there. And we paid all the expenses to come up there and they voted me in there. Well, I was voted in for three years after that from the north and the south because we...

Murray: Each year you had an election?

Joe: Yes, each year when we had an election there, I was voted in.

Murray: Did someone run against you each time or did you...?

Joe: Oh yes, I had opposition each time. Oh yes, I had quite an opposition each time.

Murray: So it was a battle each time?

Joe: Yes. It was a battle.

Murray: Do you think that during those elections that most people still had sort of the same ideas about what the organization should do or were there, when the election happened between you and your opponent, were there different ideas being put forward, do you think?

Joe: Yes, well, there was different ideas put forward but my idea was, it was better. They seen that I was going ahead with it and I had no problems getting in. Until the last time when Howard Adams ran against me.

Murray: That's the one you lost?

Joe: That's when I lost, yes, in 1969.

Murray: Could you tell me a bit about that election? Was it - do you think it was a fair election?

Joe: Well, I hate to say it but it wasn't.

Murray: Could you describe that a bit for me?

Joe: There were voters in there that was brought in that they were not entitled to vote.

Murray: These were people who were not members of the...?

Joe: Those were my opponents.

Murray: And these were people who were not members of the Association, is that correct?

Joe: No, that's correct.

Murray: They were native people but not...

Joe: No, they were not even native people.

Murray: There were whites involved too, then?

Joe: There were whites involved.

Murray: Do you know where they came from?

Joe: Oh yes. I know them all.

Murray: They were brought in from Saskatoon or Prince Albert or...?

Joe: Saskatoon, Prince Albert. They were brought in from the north and Lestock.

Murray: Were these all people who had, do you think they all bought memberships just before the election? Was that what happened or...?

Joe: No, it's people that they were married to Metis people, Metis. But then again, you see, they weren't allowed to vote anyway because they were only associate members. Even if they did have a card, they weren't allowed to vote. They were only associate members. But they still voted.

Murray: So the husbands or wives of a Metis person were entitled to an associate membership?

Joe: Yes.

Murray: And so you think that that election was rigged in a way then, wasn't it?

Joe: It was rigged. It was rigged.

Murray: Was it close anyway?

Joe: Yes, it was close enough. I win the election but there was a lot crooked voting and I lost out.

Murray: So you think that the votes weren't counted properly either or...?

Joe: No, the votes, they weren't counted proper because - now, mind you, this I can't confirm this - but a month after, I seen a guy in there and he told me I won that election by three votes. But he said, "We were paid to give it to Howard Adams."

Murray: Is that right?

Joe: Yeah.

Murray: Can you give me the name of that person?

Joe: No, I couldn't give you the name but as far as that I couldn't confirm. You see I can't. Maybe he can confirm it but I have my doubts. And this is what I was told anyway. Well, I could have called a recount on the ballots. But you see, that breaks the constitution right there with me. My people broke the constitution there because in my constitution it said in there, "Any person who works for the government or involved with the government shall not be entitled to office in the Metis Society of Saskatchewan." But they broke it there when they elected Howard Adams.

Murray: Because he worked for the University then didn't he?

Joe: Yes.

Murray: Right.

Joe: And you see that he had a PhD. and he was a smart man. I figured well, I had it for 3 years and I got it on its feet. I can't stay forever anyway.

Murray: So, it wasn't a matter of jealousy or anything. It was fine that someone else got it.

Joe: I figured well, it might be better for the people because he is a man that will fight for it, you know what I mean. He was well-educated and he was a smart man and I figured well, he might do a lot of good for the people. But instead of that, everything went down for two years. There was nothing done for two years after that. You see, they threw out all my programs. This is why I'm keeping this book.

Murray: Right. So you have proof of that.

Joe: I got proof of what they threw out of there. You see, all my housing projects, it's all here.

Murray: They all ended after you got defeated?

Joe: Yeah, the schools even. They didn't have no schools. And I still have the, in 1969 I had my schools already set up for 1969 where the school was to be held and everything. They never held them. That's why I kept them.

Murray: So the new organization under Howard just cancelled



them all?

Joe: They cancelled it for everything.

Murray: They just went to the government and said, "We don't want this anymore," or is that what they did or how did it work? Did they just neglect it?

Joe: Well, I was elected on the board of directors after I was defeated. And I accepted the board of directors. And we had a meeting in Watrous. That was halfway, you know, between Prince Albert and Saskatoon and where we came from. And they passed, Howard Adams passed a resolution there that nobody will go to the government. None of the board of directors will go to the government for anything. Stay away from the government. So that was alright and I sat there and I says, "Well, that's fine. If you are not allowing the Metis Society to go to the government, therefore you can't go neither. The president can't go, if we can't go, the board of directors."

Murray: Then you shouldn't be able to.

Joe: Then he shouldn't be able to. So we passed that resolution that nobody could go. So that's when everything was dead.

Murray: Did he explain that, why he didn't want anyone to go to the government?

Joe: Yes, he explained it. He figured that we were going to jeopardize from the government and disorganize our organization but I think he was disorganizing it himself.

Murray: Do you think that what he was saying was the same sort of thing that Malcolm was saying?

Joe: Yes, practically the same, practically the same.

Murray: That it is dangerous for the organization to be involved with government, that was the message?

Joe: That was the message, yes. That was the message we got. However, anyway that's the way it went. And then the next year in 1970, that's when, whatcha call him, he went in too.

Murray: Jim Sinclair?

Joe: Jim Sinclair. Now there is another one he should never have been elected.

Murray: What happened that time?

Joe: Well, as I say he bought the votes and what can you do?

Murray: How did he buy them?

Joe: Pay the guys.

Murray: He just handed out the money?

Joe: Yeah, pay the guys to be voted in. The same with Howard Adams, they were paying the guys.

Murray: They actually gave them money to say, "Okay, here is five dollars, you vote for Howard Adams," or was it that kind of buying or was it more subtle than that?

Joe: Twenty-five dollars got for each local that they voted in for him.

Murray: Each local got \$25?

Joe: Twenty-five dollars. This is what I was told. Now mind you, I can't prove this, but a lot of guys told me after.

Murray: But people who supported you found that out, is that right?

Joe: Yes, well, even the guys that voted against me, they even told me after.

Murray: That they were offered money to.

Joe: Yeah, he said they were sorry after they did in there but he says, "We were bought out." This is what they told me. Well I said, "It's up to you guys." (chuckles)

Murray: So Indian politics is just as dirty as the other politics, I guess.

Joe: Oh yes, well, like I said, it was who got the most money had the best run.

Murray: I'm a bit confused about that \$25. How did that work? Like the local would get that to distribute among its people?

Joe: See there was four in each local.

Murray: Four delegates.

Joe: Four voters, four delegates in each local.

Murray: So they each got six dollars and twenty-five cents.

Joe: Yeah, whatever it is.

Murray: And it would have been somebody working for Adams or Sinclair who would have handed out the money or maybe offered it I suppose. It wouldn't have been the men themselves probably.

Joe: No, no, somebody offered in there and they payed them.

Murray: And then obviously some people sold their votes.

Joe: Yeah, well this is what they did, sold their votes instead of...

Murray: Voting on principle.

Joe: Vote on principle. That's right.

Murray: And did you run again in 1970 for the board of directors or did you...?

Joe: No, no, I was going to run in 1970. I had all my papers, my speeches and everything but I went to the meeting in there. While I was at the meeting in there, I couldn't - they were all against me. And instead of the discussed about the organization, it was Jim Sinclair, he was campaigning in the convention. And Wally Stafford, a man from that... we used to have that Indian Metis place here.

Murray: Friendship centre?

Joe: No, it was not a friendship centre. What did they call that now? Well, anyway it doesn't matter. I seen it there. I says, "Well, there is no use in me running, Wally." He says, "Why?" "Well," I says, "you see it's already bought out all the votes already and I haven't got the money to buy them out."

Murray: So you were going to run for president that year?

Joe: Yes, I was going to. So I didn't even bother running.

Murray: So you didn't even bother running for president or board of directors. At that point you just left the organization?

Joe: I just left the organization, yeah. I see how crooked it was running.

Murray: You were pretty fed up then?

Joe: Well, I was then. And there was nothing done for that year and a half, well two years, say. There was nothing done about it. Everything went. They threw all of my projects out which I had coming good. So I just washed my hands out of it, I said, "That's it."

Murray: So, since 1970 you haven't had anything to do with it?

Joe: I haven't had nothing to do with it, no.

Murray: I came across a name that I haven't found this person and his name was La Rocque. Do you know him at all? Was he involved with the Metis?

Joe: La Rocque, oh there was lots of La Rocques. That's from Lebret. They were from Lebret them La Rocques. Yes, they were involved with it. They had their own local down there.

Murray: Because I remember someone in Green Lake saying that there had been a fellow by the name of La Rocque come up and talk about a Metis Association. You don't know who that would be?

Joe: Oh, that's years ago, I guess.

Murray: Maybe, yeah. Before Malcolm apparently.

Joe: Yes, that was Joe La Rocque. Yeah, he...

Murray: Joe?

Joe: He died, of course, a long time ago. But he was very much strong with that organization. Yes, he went all over to try to get it going.

Murray: Do you know when that would have been?

Joe: That'll be way back in the 1930s.

Murray: 1930s, eh.

Joe: Oh yes, way back in the 1930s. There was La Rocque and there was another one, Joe Ross. He was a blind man. He was pretty good on that too.

Murray: And the organization in the 1930s, was that all over the province or was it a smaller organization?

Joe: No, it was all over the province. That was all over the province.

Murray: You don't know where there would be any papers about that organization?

Joe: Yes, you can find all them papers if you go to the...

Murray: Archives?

Joe: Archives, yeah.

Murray: They're in there?

Joe: They are all in there. That's where I got lots of it after I got a president. I went in there and spent days in there going in. They used to let me have the books in there and they are all there.

Murray: But you have got the papers for your organization from 1962 onwards, eh?

Joe: No, not all of them, I just got part of them.

Murray: And the others would have been left with the Metis?

Joe: Yes, the others, I left them. You take all the government letters, what I got, the grants and all that. Well, I got a few here, just copies, but the rest I left them because it was the property of the Metis Society so I couldn't very well take them.

Murray: Did you ever get a letter from Malcolm Norris? Did he ever communicate with you by letter?

Joe: No, never. They never communicate with me. They never did.

Murray: If there was any communication, it was on your initiative, not on his?

Joe: Yes, well Rod used to communicate with me.

Murray: So Rod probably thought that Malcolm was wrong in not communicating.

Joe: Yes.

Murray: He decided it was worthwhile?

Joe: Yes, well he decided - well, me and Rod, we used to get along good.

Murray: I think he's one of the better people.

Joe: Yes, well he was bull-headed too. (chuckles)

Murray: A lot of bull-headed people in that organization.

Joe: Yeah. But it was a good organization. It's too bad it went a little bit out of kilter for a while there but I hope they got it back on their feet again. I was going to help my people. I had to start from the weak side and this is where I started from see. Naturally I done all my housing in the north.

Murray: Where the conditions were worse.

Joe: Where it was worse. Because the south people, they weren't that bad with their housing. There were some bad ones in here too but I started my foundation from the poor side. I didn't start from the strong side. And this is...

Murray: How did Malcolm see it, what did he see when you were building houses up north? When were the first houses built? In 1965 I think you said?

Joe: I think it was in 1965. Well, then Malcolm Norris, he had nothing to do with anything you see. I don't know how he would take that if he was still living at the time but I know

he...

Murray: Did he sort of see you as someone who was infringing on his territory perhaps?

Joe: Well, this is what I figured.

Murray: So that if he knew that there were houses being built there by your organization, he might feel that you were butting in or something?

Joe: Well, I think he would have stopped me. He would object to all that. He would have thrown me out from there. (My papers all mixed up in there.) (Break in tape)

I handled the fighting.

Murray: Right, the pressure on the government to make them build.

Joe: Right. I done the pressure and they done the buildings.

Murray: Who decided in those situations who got the houses? Would the government decide that as well?

Joe: Yeah, well you see, I had...

Murray: To see who had need and...?

Joe: Yes. I seen where were the weakest spots first and I brought down there when we were dealing with the houses and I went up there and started. It will tell you the whole thing in here, where I started and everything with housing. That guy was looking at it here the other night, all these papers here. He says "Oh, you've done a lot of work on it". I said, "I sure did but I still didn't do them any good."

Murray: Everything that's important takes time, I guess.

Joe: Over three and a half years there I was...(Break in tape)

I had eighteen classrooms in 1967 and 1968.

Murray: Eighteen different classes of upgrading.

Joe: Eighteen classrooms. That's pretty good. And in that period of time, the Indians had three hundred and sixty students.

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

PROPER NAME INDEX

PROPER NAME	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
-------------	-----------	----------	--------	--------

ADAMS, HOWARD	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	20, 26-30
AMYOTTE, JOE	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	2-35
BISHOP, ROD	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	17, 20, 21, 24, 33
BROADVIEW, SASK.	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	9
FORT QU'APPELLE, SASK.	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	4, 5, 8, 23
LA ROCQUE, J.Z.	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	31, 32
NORRIS, MALCOLM	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	14-24, 33, 34
PRINCE ALBERT, SASK.	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	24, 25
ROSS, JOE	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	32
SINCLAIR, JIM	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	29, 30, 31

#### INDEX

INDEX TERM	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
EDUCATION				
-upgrading	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	7, 8, 9, 28, 35
HOUSING				
-programs	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	9, 10, 33, 34
METIS				
-political organization	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	2-35
POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS				
-Metis Association of Saskatchewan	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	14-25
POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS				
-Metis Society of Saskatchewan	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	2-12, 15-33
POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS				
-leadership	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	25-31
POLITICAL PARTIES				
-Liberal	IH-420	JOE AMYOTTE	68	12