

## Gilbert Pelletier, Senator, MN-S (1939-2011)

Gilbert was born on December 12, 1939 at the Métis road allowance community of Crescent Lake, Saskatchewan. He is the son of Joseph Pelletier and Isabelle Flamant. His father was born in the Turtle Mountain area near Dunsieith, North Dakota. His mother was born near Yorkton, Saskatchewan. Gilbert comes from a long line of Metis buffalo hunters. His paternal grandfather was Abraham Pelletier<sup>1</sup>. Gilbert's great-grandfather was Antoine Pelletier.<sup>2</sup> Gilbert's father spoke seven languages: French, English, Michif, Plains Cree, Nakota, Dakota and Lakota. Gilbert was a gifted Michif storyteller, like his father and grandfather before him, and enjoyed telling stories and sharing Michif culture with Métis youth and children. He recalled that when he was a youngster the Métis would meet and set up their tents along the road allowance. At night he loved to sneak out and eavesdrop as the adults told stories while sitting around the campfire. Gilbert continued this family tradition by telling various kinds of stories including those about Rougarous, Nanabush and Chi-Jean.



Norman Fleury (left), Gilbert Pelletier (centre) Lawrence Barkwell (right) at Metisfest 2009, International Peace Gardens.

Gilbert married Mary Pelletier, who is originally from the Métis road allowance community of Crooked Lake, Saskatchewan. Gilbert was an organizer and community development worker for the Métis Society of Saskatchewan (now the Métis Nation – Saskatchewan) in the early 1960s and was later the president of the Métis Society local in Esterhazy, Saskatchewan. In 2000, in recognition of his years of service to the Métis people, he was appointed as the Chair of the Métis Senate of Saskatchewan. Gilbert was very community-minded and served not only the Métis Nation, but others as well, in his

<sup>1</sup> Abraham Pelletier was born on December 7, 1869 at St. Francois Xavier. He married Helene St. Pierre the daughter of Louis St. Pierre and Marie Louise Decoteau.

<sup>2</sup> Antoine Pelletier (b. 1824) was a Pembina buffalo hunter. He was enumerated in 1850 at age 26 while living in his parents household. His father was Charles Pelletier (b. 1788, also listed as a hunter) and mother was Suzanne Bercier. Antoine married Julie Fournier, the daughter of Francois Fournier and Angelique Methote. He died in 1874 at Baie St. Paul. Antoine's brother, Cuthbert Pelletier (b. 1846) was one of the Metis hunting band at Cypress Hills who signed the 1878 Metis petition for a reserve along the Canada-U.S.A. border. Cuthbert was a member of the Turtle Mountain Band.

capacities as a potash mine worker (in Esterhazy), an employee of Saskatchewan's social welfare department (now Community Resources and Employment), an Assistant Probation Officer for youth, a Board of Director for the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Commission and as a foster parent: Gilbert and Mary have raised numerous foster children, in addition to their own children (Gale, Eleanore and Avaline).

Gilbert was actively involved with the Michif Speakers Association in Saskatchewan and worked closely with the Gabriel Dumont Institute in its efforts to revitalize and preserve this unique language of the Métis. He is featured on the film *Our Life on the Road Allowance: The Story of the Crescent Lake Métis*. (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, Leah Dorion (Producer), 2002). Gilbert and Mary Pelletier lived 30 miles south of Yorkton, Saskatchewan. Gilbert was a contributor of the story "Li deu kouzaens" (pp. 28-29) to *Metis Legacy Vol. II* (2006, Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications and Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute).

Gilbert passed away on November 1, 2011 at Yorkton.

Reference:

Barkwell, L.J., "Biography: Senator Gilbert Pelletier, Metis Elder," *New Breed Magazine*, Volume 33, Issue 2: 9, March-April, 2004.



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