

Delia Cunningham Gray, NAFC Senator. (1917-1999)

Delia was born in 1917, the daughter of Henry Cunningham¹ (b. 1869) and Mary Rachael Rowand. Delia married Robert Gray (1914-1975), the son of Philippe Gray (b. 1861) and Clara (Clarisse) Belcourt dit Karakonti (Callihoo).

The National Association of Friendship Centres² gives the following tribute:

Each year on November 16th, the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) pays tribute to Mrs. Delia Gray by hosting the Delia Gray Memorial Gala. The memorial gala is a way for people to remember the late Delia Gray who was a special lady to the Métis Nation. She was often referred to as the Matriarch of the Métis Nation of Alberta. She was the first Provincial Elder, Advisor to the Provincial President and Vice-President of the MNA and they honour her memory by carrying on the tradition for her love of education, her love for dance and her love for visiting.

She had just begun her second term as Provincial Elder when she humbly passed on November 12, 1999 at the Royal Alex Hospital in Edmonton, AB surrounded by the people she loved and gave herself the most for – her family. She was predeceased by her husband Robert (Bob) Gray in 1975.

Delia was born at Wabesca Lake, Alberta on March 17, 1917 and devoted her entire life to the preservation of the Cree language and Métis culture. A spiritually devout person, she was often called upon to deliver the opening prayers at numerous functions. She was an active member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, the Canadian Native Friendship Centre, the Royal Canadian Legion (Kingsway Legion Ladies Auxiliary) and a Senator for the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC).

In November, 2000, the Métis Nation of Alberta honoured the memory of this great lady by renaming their provincial head office building the "Delia Gray Building". At the same time, the Delia Gray Memorial Scholarship was established to continue with Mrs. Gray's vision of educating Métis youth. Members of the Gray family select two recipients for this prestigious scholarship based on the educational goals of each candidate. The two recipients are each awarded a \$1,0000 scholarship at the Delia Gray Memorial Gala.

Delia is survived by her loving family – daughters Bobbi, Betty, Anne, as well as her sons Gordon, Glenn, Harold and Robert Jr. She also left behind her granddaughters Cindy Baker and Krista Leddy as well as four great granddaughters and her sisters Maria Cunningham and Bessy Draney.

She was a very active person in the community of Edmonton. She and her husband Robert were instrumental in the development of the Canadian Native Friendship Centre (CNFC) since its beginning in 1963. Over the years she sat as a board member and was appointed as the Life time member for over 10 years, as well as a Senator for the NAFC. Delia was also responsible for the creation of

¹ Henry was the son of John Cunningham (b. 1815) and his second wife Rosalie L'Hirondelle. Henry's older brother Reverend Edward Cunningham (b. 1862) was the first Métis priest (ordained March 19, 1890).

² *Our History*, <http://nafc.ca/delia.htm>

the All Native Festival from 1964 to 1996 that showcased Aboriginal talent from across the Province of Alberta in the arts of singing, fiddling, Red River Jig and Métis dancing. She and her husband Bob started the Native Masses at St. Joseph's Cathedral in 1970 through to 1980, when the Native Pastoral took over which eventually continued with the services at Sacred Heart Church. She was a member of the Aboriginal Veterans Society of Alberta, a recognized Elder for the University of Alberta Native Studies Program and a member of the Native Seniors Centre where she enjoyed Wednesday lunches and cards with friends. Over the years, Delia had two real good friends she could confide in and always supported them back when they needed a shoulder to cry on. Georgina Donald (NAFC Life time member) and Delia met about 49 years ago and were very close as they gave birth to their children in the same years. They attended several NAFC meetings across Canada together. They both ran weekly square dances at the old Friendship Centre downtown and enjoyed listening to all the old time music.

Another good friend of Delia's was Teri House. Teri always talked to Delia and Georgina when she needed a friend and Teri was always there for Delia when she needed a ride somewhere or to go shopping. Teri felt so close to Delia that she called her "Mom". Teri predeceased both Delia and Georgina and it brought much sadness to them both losing their good friend.

Delia had several gifts she shared in her community. She had a photographic memory when it came to knowing family trees of different families across the province. If you gave her a name, she could name the families genealogy starting with the grandparents and usually tell a story about someone in that family. This had a very special meaning to many young people, especially children that had been adopted out when they were younger. Her other special gift was being able to speak to young people. She exemplified the saying "To get respect, you give respect". She always encouraged young people to do their best and always complimented them not only on their achievements but also on their efforts and would provide them with the wisdom not to give up and try harder the next time.

Delia Gray was very passionate about the Métis people and she touched many lives during her lifetime.

She will always be remembered as a great Métis lady who will be forever missed by the Métis Nation of Alberta, the National Association of Friendship Centres and by all who knew and loved her.




Family Scrip:

Cunningham, Henry - Concerning his claim as a child - Address, St. Albert - Born, January 1, 1869 at St. Albert - Father, Johnny Cunningham, deceased, (Métis) - Mother, Rosalie L'Hyronnelle, (Métis) - Scrip for \$240 - Claim 631.

No. 413 Form J.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, CANADA,



NORTH WEST HALF-BREED COMMISSION.

St. Albert 10 June 1885

This is to Certify that Henry Cunningham
a Half-Breed, has proved to the satisfaction of the Commission that he was residing in the North West Territories previous to the 15th day of July, 1870, and under Sub-clause (E) of Clause 81 of the Dominion Lands Act, 1883, and the Order in Council of the 30th March, 1885, is entitled at this date to Scrip to the amount of Two hundred and forty dollars.

The Scrip called for by this Certificate, amounting to Two hundred and forty dollars, will be payable to bearer, will specify the name of the person in whose favour it is granted, and will be delivered to the person producing this Certificate. Said Scrip will be accepted at par in payment of Dominion Lands.

H. R. Sturt
Chairman of the Commission.

Gray, Philippe - Concerning his claim as a child - Address, St. Albert P.O. [Post Office] - Born, 1861 at Lac Ste. Anne - Father, Joseph Gray, (Métis) - Mother, Susanne Callio, (Métis) - Scrip for \$240 - Claim 945.

No. 592 Form J.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, CANADA,



NORTH WEST HALF-BREED COMMISSION.

Attest 22 June 1885

This is to Certify that *Philippe Gray*

a Half-Breed, has proved to the satisfaction of the Commission that he was residing in the North West Territories previous to the 15th day of July, 1870, and under Sub-clause (E) of Clause 81 of the Dominion Lands Act, 1883, and the Order in Council of the 30th March, 1885, is entitled at this date to Scrip to the amount of *240* dollars.

The Scrip called for by this Certificate, amounting to *240* dollars, will be payable to bearer, will specify the name of the person in whose favour it is granted, and will be delivered to the person producing this Certificate. Said Scrip will be accepted at par in payment of Dominion Lands.

W. D. R. Hunt

Chairman of the Commission.



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