

# An Institute of Our Own

## A History of the Gabriel Dumont Institute

by Lisa Bird-Wilson





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“In your story you can’t leave any people out—the thousands of people that came to our meetings, the thousands of people that came to our demonstrations. They’re the builders of Dumont. No one person can take responsibility.”

*~Jim Sinclair, 2011*

## Publisher's Introduction

Like many great organizations, the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) started as a vision by people who wanted to effect positive change. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who proposed the Institute and to our forbearers for modelling the resilience and determination required to create and sustain GDI. The Institute had humble beginnings, yet through the dedication and commitment of many people within the Institute and in the broader community, it has grown to be Saskatchewan's largest employer of Métis, serving the education and training needs of thousands while keeping Métis history and culture as its guide. The Institute's 30th anniversary, which was themed "Rooted in Culture, Seeding the Future," seemed the perfect catalyst to capture the last three decades, especially since most of those key players involved in building GDI are still with us. The Institute is enormously grateful to Lisa Bird-Wilson who has aptly captured the history of GDI including the highs and lows of its growth, the numerous contributors to its development, and the host of achievements it has accomplished to date. It is our hope that this history will serve as a model of how a dream can become a thriving reality.

*Karon Shmon  
Publishing Director  
Gabriel Dumont Institute  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
October, 2011*

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

*~Margaret Mead*

## Author's Introduction

The spark which originated this book came about in 2010 at the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) 30th anniversary celebrations when GDI Executive Director, Geordy McCaffrey, made a one-hour presentation about the history of the Institute. The idea of researching back to the Métis political movement in 1970s Saskatchewan to more fully understand the Institute's origins seemed fascinating. Later at the conference, I sat with Karon Shmon, GDI Publishing Director, and we agreed that Geordy's presentation should be written up in some formal way. Later, when the opportunity arose, Karon secured funding for the project and I jumped at the chance to do its research and writing. I am grateful to Geordy for coming up with the idea, doing the initial research, and for sharing his notes with me and to Karon for getting the project off the ground.

Not long into the research, it became obvious what a benefit it would be to interview some of the people who were around in the Institute's early days and who could remember the circumstances and events that led to GDI's establishment. I am so grateful to those individuals who agreed to be interviewed for this project, people like Murray Hamilton, Jim Sinclair, Clément Chartier, Wayne McKenzie, Doug McArthur, Chris LaFontaine, Max Morin, Glenn Lafleur, Lorraine Amiotte, Marilyn Belhumeur, Roger Butterfield, and others. I also appreciate those who were able to put a more recent perspective on things such as Skip Kutz, Michael Relland, Geordy McCaffrey, Karon Shmon, Pat Atkinson, Joanne Pelletier, Darren Préfontaine, and numerous others. Marsii for the stories, information, and memories that you shared! My only regret is not having more time to hear more stories.

In writing an account of past events that relies heavily on people's oral stories and memories, a writer risks missing nuances, misunderstanding, and simply not "getting" the whole picture. For any and all of these occasions, I apologize in advance. Any errors or omissions in this book are mine alone.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge funding for this project by the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

*Lisa Bird-Wilson  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
July, 2011*



If you have information, stories, comments, or ideas to share about the Gabriel Dumont Institute's founding and history, please contact us at:

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*or*

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*Honouring the founders and builders of  
the Gabriel Dumont Institute*

## List of Acronyms

AEEI	Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration
AHRDA	Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement
AIM	American Indian Movement
AMNSIS	Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan
ASETS	Aboriginal Skills, Employment and Training Strategy
CEIC	Canada Employment and Immigration Commission
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CTR	Community Training Residence
DAEM	Department of Advanced Education and Manpower
DNS	Department of Northern Saskatchewan
DTI	Dumont Technical Institute
FSIN	Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations
GDC	Gabriel Dumont College
GDI	Gabriel Dumont Institute
GDIT&E	Gabriel Dumont Institute Training and Employment
GDSF	Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation
Itep	Indian Teacher Education Program
LAMB	Local Aboriginal Management Board
LMMB	Local Métis Management Board
METSI	Métis Employment and Training of Saskatchewan Inc
MNC	Métis National Council
MNS	Métis Nation of Saskatchewan; Métis Nation—Saskatchewan
MSS	Métis Society of Saskatchewan

NDP	New Democratic Party
NIB	National Indian Brotherhood
NORTEP	Northern Teacher Education Program
NRIM	Non Registered Indian and Métis
NSD	Native Services Division
NSIM	Non Status Indian and Métis
PTA	Provincial Training Allowance
RAMB	Regional Aboriginal Management Board
RBA	Regional Bilateral Agreements
RMMB	Regional Métis Management Board
SETE	Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment
SGEU	Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union
SIFC	Saskatchewan Indian Federated College
SMEDCO	Saskatchewan Métis Economic Development Corporation
SNEDCO	Saskatchewan Native Economic Development Corporation
SSEP	Saskatchewan Skills Extension Program
SUNTEP	Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program
TEP(s)	Teacher Education Program(s)
U of R	University of Regina
U of S	University of Saskatchewan

# 1 Setting the Scene

The year was 1976. Pierre Trudeau was Prime Minister. The Premier of Saskatchewan was Allan Blakeney. It was the year when the death penalty was abolished in Canada. Treaty 6 was 100 years old. Montréal hosted the Summer Olympics. American Indian Movement (AIM) activist, Leonard Peltier was arrested and extradited from Canada. Many of the prevailing concerns of Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan centred on justice reform, Aboriginal incarceration rates, economic development, northern development, education, child welfare, and housing. Poverty in Aboriginal communities was rampant. Aboriginal children were being extricated from homes and communities; sent south to Euro-Canadian foster homes and adoptions.

South of the border, AIM and the Red Power movement provided an example to follow. As part of the Red Power movement, Native Americans occupied and held the deserted prison on Alcatraz Island in 1969, bringing media attention to the plight of Native Americans and to their demands. In 1972, AIM seized the head office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and in 1973 AIM occupied Wounded Knee for a 71-day standoff. The influence on Saskatchewan Aboriginal people was clear as the Métis political body took up the AIM example and held a number of sit-ins and other forms of public protest. The effect of such campaigns was evident. Ken Collier notes that Métis dissent produced tangible results. “During the [1971] election campaign a critical confrontation took place in the settlement of Buffalo Narrows in the mid-northwest

of the province. NDP leader Allan Blakeney toured the north as he had the south in his election bus. The Métis Society of Saskatchewan [MSS] staged a demonstration that escalated into a blockage of the road so the bus could not leave Buffalo Narrows. In this confrontation, the premier-to-be reluctantly stated that the NDP would set up a ‘department of the north’ though this had not been a campaign promise at the beginning of the election.”<sup>1</sup> The Métis had succeeded in extracting a promise for a northern department. The NDP’s 1971 election platform, the *New Deal For People*, “included the NDP promise to ‘develop a comprehensive northern development program with emphasis on the needs of our native people.’”<sup>2</sup> Following the NDP election victory, the Department of Northern

*“...the relationship between the MSS and the NDP government was ‘tumultuous’”*

*~ Murray Hamilton*

Saskatchewan (DNS) was established. Militant strategies of demonstrating and blocking roads produced results for the Métis and became a consistent and somewhat reliable weapon in the fight for social justice.



Allan Blakeney,  
*New Breed Magazine*, October 1974, 2.

In a 1974 article from the Regina *Leader-Post* and reprinted in *New Breed Magazine*<sup>3</sup>, Premier Allan Blakeney stated, “the public is getting fed up with the sit-ins and the tent-ins” in reference to the most recent MSS-led sit-in/camp-in on the lawn of the Saskatchewan Legislature. The Mayor of Calgary, Rod Skyes, stated, “The Indians should have learned the lessons from the Riel Rebellion,” referring to a sit-in at the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in 1976, Saskatchewan Métis and Non-Status Indians

occupied the office of the Minister of Social Services in protest of the adoption and foster home program’s effects on Aboriginal children and communities. A photograph of the Deputy Minister making his “one phone call” after being given five minutes to vacate his office appeared in Saskatchewan’s *New Breed Magazine*.<sup>5</sup>

The relationship between the Métis and the provincial government continued on a turbulent path over the mid-to-late 1970s. Murray Hamilton—long-time Métis activist, leader, and politician, who is now a GDI SUNTEP Coordinator—recalls that the relationship between the MSS and the NDP government was “tumultuous” over those years. “The Métis were asking for a lot of things at that time,” he says. In 1979, *National Geographic* had an article about the Saskatchewan Métis’ blockade of the road into Prince



*Social Services Sit in, Deputy Minister Allowed One Phone Call,*  
*New Breed Magazine*, May-June 1976, 13.

Albert National Park in the fall of 1978, which occurred while a meeting of the provincial premiers was occurring. The magazine reported that the road was reopened when Premier Allan Blakeney met with the Métis leaders “to discuss their

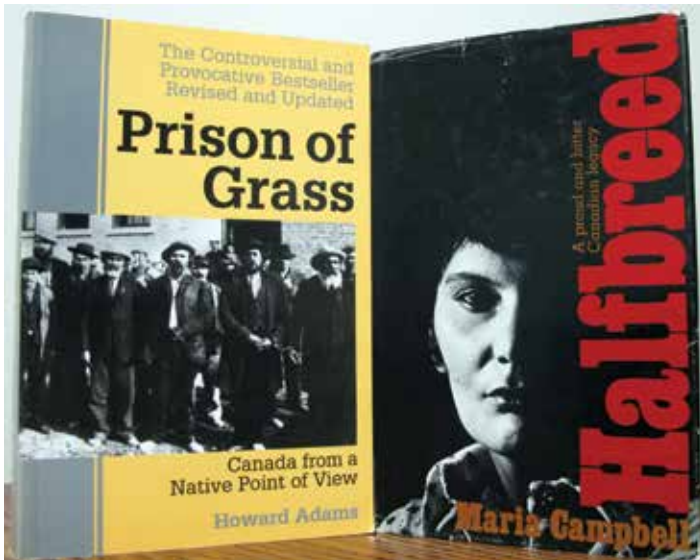
problems.”<sup>6</sup> According to Murray Hamilton, there were approximately 100-150 Métis at the south gate and as many as 300-400 at the north gate blocking park access for a day or two in order to bring attention to housing and education issues and funding for addiction treatment centres.

In addition to the militant example of AIM to the south, a number of Aboriginal writers were emerging in Canada and were having an influence

on the consciousness of Aboriginal people and groups. In 1969, Harold Cardinal wrote *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada’s Indians*, which voiced strong Aboriginal opposition to government assimilationist policies. In 1973, Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* was published to enthusiastic reviews. One reviewer noted *Halfbreed* as, “one of the most powerful books I have ever read.”<sup>7</sup> Novelist Rudy Wiebe noted, “This book is required reading. Here speaks a voice never heard before with such direct frankness, such humor: the voice of the true Canadian woman.”<sup>8</sup>



*Newly Elected Board Member, Murray Hamilton, New Breed Magazine, October 1978, 18.*



*Prison of Grass, 1980. GDI Archives*

*Halfbreed, 1973. GDI Archives*



Maria Campbell, May 1973.  
GDI Archives

*Halfbreed* continues to be taught in schools and universities across Canada, and is considered a classic text on race and ethnic relations. Many people in the Aboriginal community continue to gather strength and inspiration from Maria Campbell's book. In 1975, Howard Adams published his book *Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View*, which was the first attempt by a Canadian Aboriginal author to provide a framework for Indigenous decolonization. The impact of these strong Aboriginal voices being published and heard cannot be disregarded in the development of the consciousness and the voice of Aboriginal peoples in the 1970s.

A review of *New Breed Magazine* from the time illustrates the prevailing Aboriginal issues as well as the relationship between Aboriginal people and the mainstream population. During the late 1960s and early '70s, the infant mortality rate for Aboriginal people was more than double that of the non-Aboriginal community, infant mortality being an important indicator of the health of a population. One in five deaths in Aboriginal communities

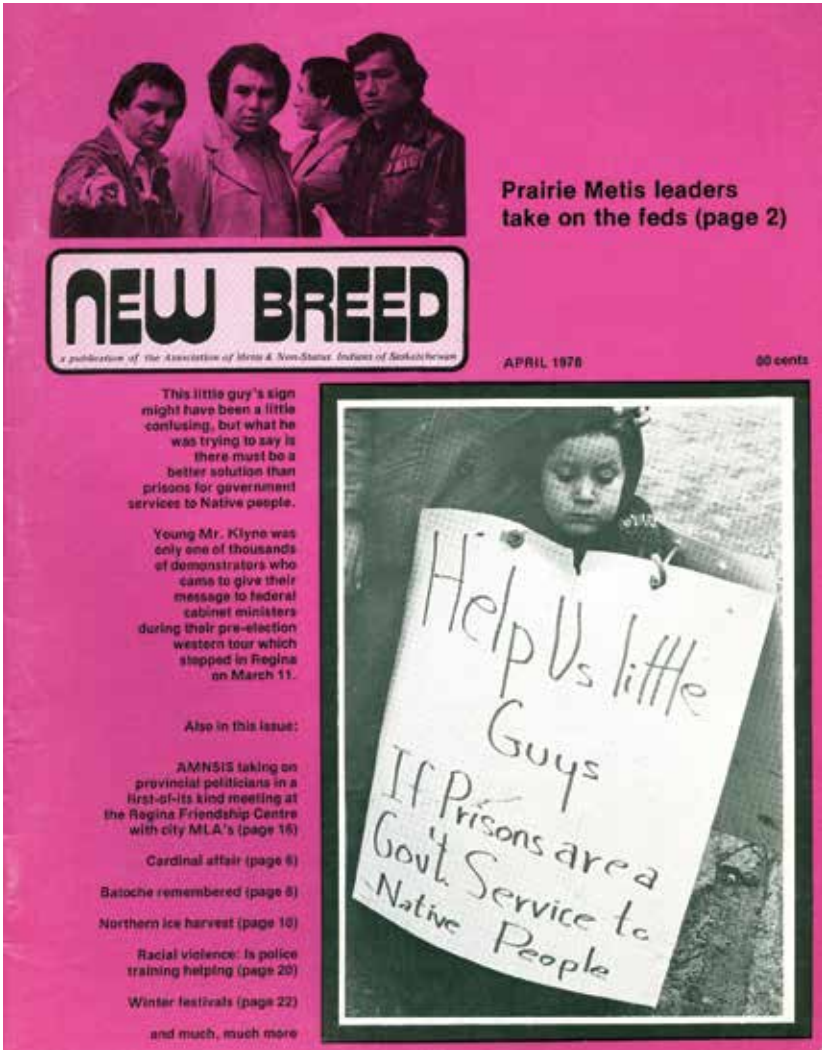


Howard Adams, 1967.  
GDI Archives

was the result of violence, compared to one in 20 in the mainstream population. In 1973, fewer than 4% of reserves had running water and 2% had indoor toilets. Aboriginal children made up 60% of those in the care of social services. Only half a percent (.5%) of the Aboriginal student population was in grade 12, and about 60% of Aboriginal students were behind their proper grade. Furthermore, 60% of Aboriginal people were unemployed.<sup>9</sup>

In 1976, mainstream politicians went on record of saying such things as the following, attributed to James Richardson, Canada's Defence Minister in 1975: "I mean what did the Indians ever do for Canada? When we found them they were still dragging things around on two sticks"<sup>10</sup> and to Ed Havrot, Conservative MP for Temiskaming, Ontario: "Those damn Indians have gone absolutely wild! We should have given them a bunch of





*New Breed Magazine Cover, April 1978*

teepee's [sic] and some cord wood and that's all. ... I could buy the Indian Chiefs off with a case of goof [cheap wine]."<sup>11</sup> It is clear from these quotes by publicly-elected officials that overt racism was alive and well in mid-70s Canada.

In 1976, inequity and social injustice compelled Aboriginal people, and “bread and butter” issues drove the agenda. As Murray Hamilton notes, “There was no rights agenda in those days, not in the mid-1970s. It was all dealing with the social and economic issues. People could relate to that.” Jim Sinclair, President of the MSS/Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan (AMNSIS) from 1971-1988, notes that the priorities were “Housing, education, and jobs. Those were the things



*Jim Sinclair Signing GDI Agreement,  
GDI Signing Ceremony, 1980. GDI Archives*

we pointed out at the time. You couldn't separate those three. If you wanted a job you had to have a house, and if you didn't have an education what kind of a job would you get? So you couldn't separate the three things. So we stuck them together as close as we could." Many of the issues were dealt with broadly as "Native issues" rather than as Métis-specific and Non-Status Indian-specific issues. Current Métis National Council (MNC) President, Clément Chartier notes that in 1976, in Saskatchewan, there was a resurgence of Métis nationalism and the recognition of the need for greater education opportunities for the Métis.

In 1976, the Métis and Non-Status Indians worked together under AMNSIS, a political lobby that advanced the interests of both groups. It would be a full 12 years before the split occurred between the Métis and the Non-Status Indians. As Jim Sinclair notes, there was a sense even in the early days of organizing that things would evolve. He says, "In 1970 or '71 they started talking about bringing the constitution back. Of course we weren't recognized at that particular time; none of us were recognized. If you weren't an Indian you weren't anybody. We were road allowance people, most of us that began this movement. And I think that if you look at it from that perspective, everyone who was left out of Canada's constitution who had no rights joined up to find their place in Canada. And we knew we'd all not end up in the same place. We all felt that."

Roger Butterfield, who was employed by the MSS/AMNSIS as Education Director from the late 1960s onward, notes that recognition was the main thing that Métis and Non-Status Indian people were after. "Métis people were considered Road Allowance people and didn't have



*Clément Chartier,  
New Breed Magazine, October 1974, 12.*

any recognition as Aboriginal people. There was a reluctance on the part of the provincial government and there was a reluctance on the part of the federal government.”

Métis people have always been politically organized; this is a well-documented fact. From the early days of the highly-organized bison hunts to the 1869-70 Red River Resistance and the 1885 Resistance, the Métis have been masters of political organization at the grassroots level. The 1970s were no exception. When recalling the leadership and political actions of the time, Murray Hamilton notes, “There was a lot more discipline in those days. People didn’t go outside of the organization or take their beef to the media. There was more group solidarity, less factionalization.” He credits the times, the organization, and the leadership for the inroads that were

made on behalf of the Métis. In a separate conversation on a different day, Wayne McKenzie, former AMNSIS Executive Director in the late '70s, echoes those sentiments, saying, “People had discipline.” He tells a story of a roadblock at Waskesiu where “500 people showed up when and where they were supposed to be. Women, children, didn’t matter—no one was afraid to be arrested. We were standing up for our rights.” On hearing these stories, one might be inclined to accuse these men of fancifully reminiscing, and yet their words ring true—those were, in fact, extraordinary times. The militancy,



Roger Butterfield,  
*New Breed Magazine*, December 1976, 20.

*“Women, children, didn’t matter—no one was afraid to be arrested. We were standing up for our rights.”*

*~ Wayne McKenzie*



*AMNSIS Activism, Early 1980s.  
Frank Tomkins and Rod Bishop. GDI Archives*



*Wayne McKenzie and Stuart Cameron Squared off at Meeting, New Breed Magazine, April 1978, 18.*

the occupations, the tension, negotiations, and the attention that the Métis drew, in fact, belong to a special time and era. As Murray Hamilton notes, “We wouldn’t have been able to do what we did without the community support.” Thinking of the road blockades, demonstrations and sit-ins, he says, “You couldn’t do that today.”

In the early 1970s, President Jim Sinclair led the MSS, which would become AMNSIS in 1975. Sinclair, a proponent of the Red Power movement and an advocate of AIM’s highly successful confrontational political strategy used in the US, led the lobby for a Métis and Non-Status Indian cultural conference in Saskatchewan. After a couple of years of lobbying and with funds from the federal department of Secretary of State, AMNSIS held a province-wide cultural conference in Saskatoon in April, 1976 with the express aim of providing an opportunity for grassroots Métis and Non-Status Indian people to have input into programming to help retain and promote Aboriginal culture.

The keynote speaker for that first AMNSIS cultural conference was Jim Sinclair. Jim Sinclair is described, by people who knew him in those days, as a dynamic personality. He was a natural public speaker with a flair for making passionate and eloquent speeches. A charismatic orator,

*“Anything I said came from the ideas of the people.”*

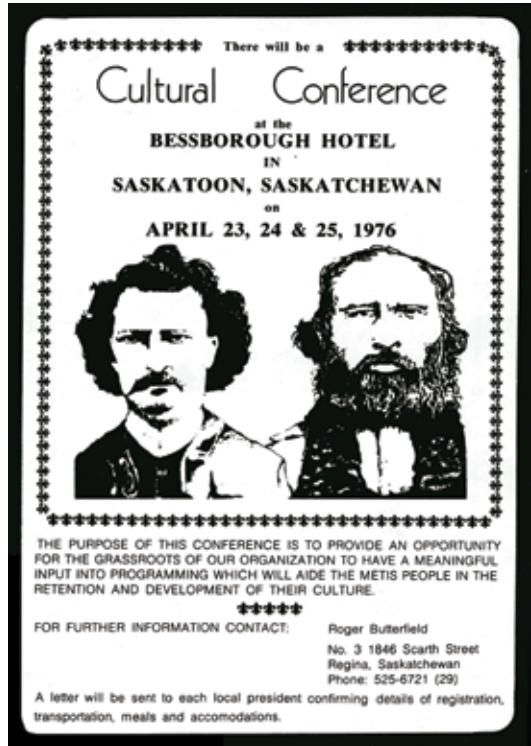
*~ Jim Sinclair*

his address at the first ever Saskatchewan Métis/Non-Status Indian cultural conference is reported in glowing terms.

Sinclair made the connection between Métis culture and economics, education, housing, and justice. He noted that before the Europeans came, First Nations people had their own cultures, laws, religion, and so on, but when the missionaries arrived, the First Nations were willing to listen, as was their way. As a result, the church, using religion as divisive force, was able to divide Aboriginal people. Policing further oppressed Aboriginal people; land was taken, and along with the land, culture was also stolen.

Sinclair spoke about reeducating Aboriginal people so that they could be a part of the democratic system, be reflected in legislation, and build an economic base. With an economic base, Sinclair noted, Métis people would be able to maintain their culture. By getting rid of welfare, police oppression, staggering Aboriginal incarceration rates, and other forms of oppression, Métis people would be able to reignite pride, cultural identity, and “instill in ourselves real self-determination. We have to hold on to our identity and we should be the proudest of all citizens since we were here first.”<sup>12</sup>

Sinclair spoke about high Aboriginal incarceration rates and the deaths of as many as three Aboriginal people per week in prison. He noted that Aboriginal people were forced to go to court to get work experience, meaning participation in a fine options program. He noted the need for Aboriginal people to see their culture as something other than booze, welfare, and the RCMP. The establishment of an Aboriginal cultural institute was seen as a means to help Aboriginal people to take control and make their own decisions, administer their own programs, and gain



*Cultural Conference,  
New Breed Magazine, May-June 1976, 18.*



*Cultural Conference Images, New Breed Magazine, May-June 1976, 19.*

cultural pride based on positive influences. About the speech he made at the 1976 cultural conference, Jim Sinclair says, “Anything I said came from the ideas of the people. I never said anything outside of that except maybe I added some things that I felt should be stressed more than others.”

Twelve breakout groups were organized around issues pressing to the Métis and Non-Status Indian people at the time, including economic development, child welfare, incarceration rates, housing, and education. The breakout groups came up with recommendations, which were brought forward and shared with all the conference’s participants. From the work that was done at the 1976 culture conference, a list of 8

prevailing goals was drafted. At the top of the list was the imperative goal to develop an Aboriginal education and cultural institute for Métis and Non-Status Indians. Most people in the Métis community today point to the 1976 conference as the catalyst for the development of the first Métis-owned and controlled post-secondary institution in Canada. The seeds for the Gabriel Dumont Institute were sown.



*Jim Sinclair, AMNIS President.  
New Breed Magazine,  
May-June 1976, p.19*

## 2 Community Activism and the need for Aboriginal Education

While the 1976 cultural conference may have been the catalyst that most immediately preceded the formation of the Institute, the issues around Aboriginal education equity and control were far from new in the mid-1970s. Jim Sinclair considers the 1976 cultural conference as “more like the halfway point. We did a lot of work before the conference.”



Jean Chrétien, April 1967.  
Library and Archives Canada,  
PA-115289

The late 1960s brought about many changes to the political landscape for Aboriginal people. The National Indian Council, which originally had the mandate to represent Status, Métis, and Non-Status Indians collapsed, which led to the formation of the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) to represent Status Indians. The demise of the National Indian Council led to the establishment of separate Status Indian, Métis, and Non-Status Indian political structures.

In 1969, Jean Chrétien, then the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, introduced the now-infamous *White Paper*. The *White Paper* proposed a dramatic change in policy toward Indian people. It looked to abolish the *Indian Act*, terminate the treaties, disassemble the administration, and treat Indian citizens the same as everyone else, regardless of important historical and Indigenous treaty rights. There was immediate and strong opposition to the *White Paper* from Aboriginal people.

In 1970, NIB and the Indian Association of Alberta introduced the *Red Paper*. The *Red Paper* argued that indeed Indians should be regarded as citizens, but as “citizens plus” with special status that recognized the special history, rights, and circumstances of First Nations people. It was a complete counter policy to the *White Paper*. It argued for the retention of Indian status, full preservation of culture, protection of federal jurisdiction, equal economic help to all reserves rather than the poorest, recognition of the spirit and intent of the treaties, and a host of other items. With the negative reaction from First Nations people, the *White Paper* and its policies eventually faded away. Future policy was to be negotiated directly

with First Nations leaders.

Shortly after the *Red Paper* was released, NIB introduced a paper called, *Indian Control of Indian Education*. It pointed out that education was the primary tool of assimilation. It asked that Indian people have control over education in order to prevent the cultural assimilation of their children. Government agreed to gradually turn over administration to Indian bands. This established an important precedent for First Nations people to control at least one institution of self-determination. Control of Indian education by Status Indians, along with a growing political awareness and community activism, would have an important influence on the eventual development of Métis education. The move toward Indian control over Indian education would have an impact on the emergence of GDI a few years later.

A review of back issues of *New Breed Magazine* reveals that Aboriginal educational inequality had been brewing for quite some time. A November 1971 article outlined the Métis stance regarding education. Starting in the early 1970s, and for a number of years following, the issue of transferring local school board authority to Aboriginal people in northern communities was raised.<sup>13</sup>

Northern education for Aboriginal people was of particular concern. Of the 30,000 northern Saskatchewan residents, approximately one third were Métis and one third were First Nations.<sup>14</sup> Northerners did not enjoy the same health and educational benefits as southern residents, For instance, as Hammersmith and Hauck note, “In 1971, major diseases such as tuberculosis and typhoid plagued northern residents at rates from two to thirty-five times provincial norms. More than sixty per cent of northern children dropped out of school before grade five.”<sup>15</sup>

*The move toward Indian control over Indian education would have an impact on the emergence of GDI a few years later.*

For instance, as Hammersmith and Hauck note, “In 1971, major diseases such as tuberculosis and typhoid plagued northern residents at rates from two to thirty-five times provincial norms. More than sixty per cent of northern children dropped out of school before grade five.”<sup>15</sup>

The Métis wanted Aboriginal people to have full control over the public schools where the population was predominantly Métis and First Nations. The need for Aboriginal teachers was raised, along with the training of such teachers. Aboriginal teachers would not be trained in the imposed and arbitrary standards of the dominant Euro-Canadian population, but would rather come into the classrooms and teach in Aboriginal languages, and in culturally appropriate ways. “It is much more important that our native teachers be qualified in terms of their understanding and sensitivity to native culture, language, nationalism, and allegiance to our people and nation.”<sup>16</sup> While these were noble sentiments, it’s obvious that future leaders came to understand that producing a differently-trained set of Aboriginal





*New Breed Magazine Cover, March-April 1979.*

teachers would ultimately produce a second class of Aboriginal teachers. By the time that the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) would become a reality, it was obvious that Aboriginal people would need to be trained as teachers according to the prevailing standards of the day along side the qualities of cultural enhancement and sensitivity.

The issue of curriculum reform was also raised in 1971. The MSS noted that the textbooks being used in classrooms with Métis and Indian children were

“racist in nature and content.”<sup>17</sup> The textbooks of the day were accused of humiliating and making inferior Aboriginal children. Likewise, classrooms were seen as places where Aboriginal children were made subservient and were encouraged to reject Aboriginal culture and values. “The classroom is a crushing and immobilizing experience.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in 1971, the MSS deemed curriculum reform inadequate unless systemic reform occurred as well. The reform of curriculum and textbooks under the current system were seen as entirely inadequate. Instead, the MSS called for the complete overhaul of the education system. Nothing short of a legislated change in school board authority would do. Local school boards in predominantly Métis and First Nations communities were to be given legislated authority to control and manage schools.

In 1973, this issue arose in Île-à-la-Crosse. The Île-à-la-Crosse school burnt down in 1972 providing the community and the MSS with the opportunity to call for a new system of control over the local school board. The MSS called for the transfer to local authority since it believed that all communities that were predominantly Métis and First Nations should have control over all public schools in their region.<sup>19</sup> This call for Aboriginal

control covered most of the schools in northern Saskatchewan. The MSS wanted Aboriginal people to have the power to elect school boards with full power and control over the schools in local Métis communities. This was seen as a way to have Métis schools with Métis teachers. The MSS demanded that the Northern School Board have no further authority over Métis schools.

Also in 1973, the MSS rearticulated the argument for Aboriginal teacher training. Again, they repeated the argument made in 1971 about different levels of qualification for Aboriginal teachers. In that same year, the Métis called for an appropriate budget to be given for a teacher training and textbook rewriting program.

In Île-à-la-Crosse, in particular, the Aboriginal dropout rate was reported as 99% under the status quo school system. In a letter to DNS Minister Ted Bowerman, the MSS noted, “The main reason why the public system rejected the present system of control of the school is because it has PERSISTENTLY FAILED THE LOCAL NATIVE PEOPLE. Nearly 50 percent of the native students have been edged out of the school as failures at the grade eight level. And less than one percent actually graduate from high school.”<sup>20</sup> The community saw the burning down of the school as a catalyst for change. The community’s Aboriginal people held a large public meeting to decide what should be done about a school system that was failing their children. They determined that the way to address the issue was to take control of every aspect of the new school including the design, construction, curriculum, and the hiring and firing of teachers. The conflict within the community was evident from the articles published in *New Breed* at the time, and discussions with Max Morin, current Métis Nation—Saskatchewan (MNS) Secretary (2007-2012), resident of Île-à-la-Crosse, and former GDI Board chair, confirm the extent of the conflict. He indicates that the community was split on the issue, with the Roman Catholic Church being against local control.

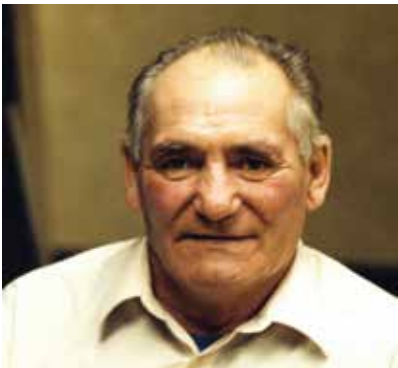


Max Morin, Mid-1990s. GDI Archives

The community engaged in a battle for control between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. In an article by Donna Pinay in which she reflects on that time, she reports, “The non-Natives who were controlling the community for years felt threatened. They said the local people were not capable of self-control and decision-making.”<sup>21</sup> As Max Morin notes, there were other reasons for the non-Aboriginal people who had been in control to resist the change, including the loss of funding for education and the church-run boarding school. The issue became so intense, he



Jonas Favel,  
*New Breed Magazine, October 1974, 9.*



Vital Morin, Late 1980s.  
*GDI Archives*

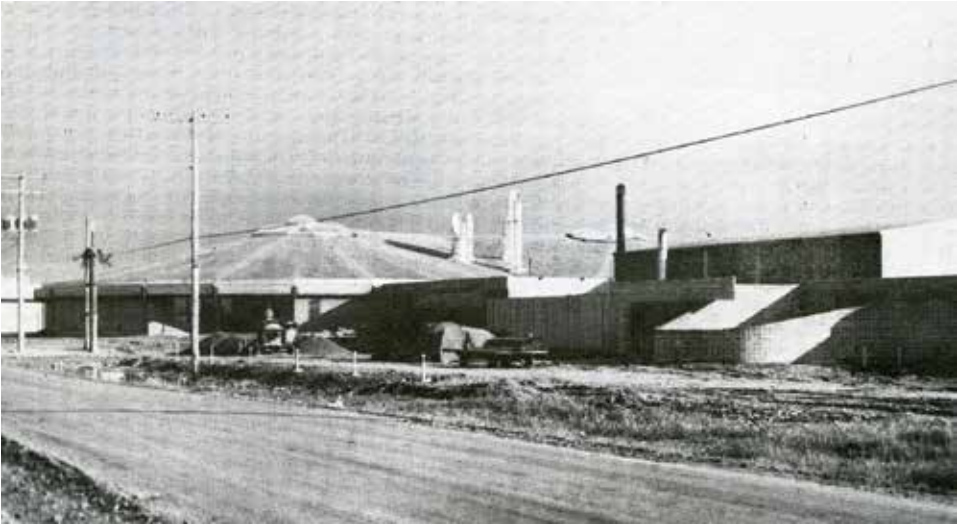
recalls, that the priest threatened people who were in favour of local control with excommunication. He jokes that Jonas Favel, a local Métis leader and activist, was heard to quip in typical Métis fashion, “Well if you’re going to excommunicate me then I want my money back for my [grave] plot.” In another more serious incident that exemplifies the intensity of the conflict, Max Morin recalls that a young Île-à-la-Crosse man in his early twenties was tragically killed at a party over an argument concerning the issue.

Ultimately, a local committee that included local Métis leaders Jonas Favel, who was the MSS Area Director at the time, Vital Morin, Johnny Roger Daigneault, and Nap Johnson, met with government officials to convince them to hold a local referendum on the issue.<sup>22</sup> The conflict culminated in a community vote that was held in early 1973. The vote was on a number of resolutions, including community control of the school’s rebuilding; the need for trades training and adult

education in the school; and local control over local education. The vote was overwhelmingly in favour of the resolutions.<sup>23</sup> Max Morin states that 85% of people wanted local control. The split in the community was not without fallout. As he notes, “When the vote came in at 85% all the teachers

*“It had nothing to do with us fighting the church or with our beliefs.”*

*~ Max Morin*



*New School, Île-à-la-Crosse, 1976. Île-à-la-Crosse, 1776–1976 Bi-Centennial.*

resigned except for one nun. They made comments like, how can a person who doesn't have any education, or a trapper or a fisherman, sit on a board and be our bosses?" In addition, some people in the community blamed Jonas Favel and Vital Morin for the priests, nuns, and teachers leaving the community. But as Max Morin notes, "It had nothing to do with us fighting the church or with our beliefs. It had more to do with us trying to decide the future of our children. It just wasn't working the way it was."<sup>24</sup>



In the spring of 1973, the new school board began to function, but as Max Morin notes, the community was still split with a seven-member school board that had members from each of the opposing sides. Teaching staff had to be recruited from as far away as the Maritimes, Ontario, and other places out east. There was further fighting and wrangling over control, but ultimately the local board was comprised of Aboriginal people, and the direction of the school turned so much so that in 1977, 15 students graduated with their grade 12—“the first for Northern Saskatchewan.”<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, in the late 1970s, it was apparent that the urban school systems in Regina and Saskatoon were not meeting the needs of the urban Aboriginal population. In a Regina *Leader-Post* article published in 1980, it was noted that of 1,792 teachers in Regina, only two were of

*... of 1,792 teachers in Regina, only two were of Aboriginal ancestry*

Aboriginal ancestry. Aboriginal students were not thriving in the urban schools, with high numbers behind their grade level and a high dropout rate before reaching high school.<sup>26</sup> As a result of this poor performance, parents in both Regina and Saskatoon also wanted to create Aboriginal schools. In 1976, the Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP) began training Aboriginal teachers for the North, and the urban centres were similarly interested in finding ways to attract Aboriginal teachers.

Alongside issues of cultural identity, cultural preservation, and self-determination, the required need for Aboriginal teachers, teacher training, and curriculum reform all contributed to GDI's founding in 1980.



### 3 Lobbying for GDI

After the 1976 cultural conference that resulted in the resolution to develop an Aboriginal educational and cultural institute, AMNSIS lobbied the government relentlessly. The lobby effort included many of the militant actions AMNSIS used in those days, such as sit-ins, occupations of government buildings, protests, and demonstrations. As Jim Sinclair notes, “Everything in those days was done through confrontation politics.” AMNSIS continued this kind of lobbying effort with the government until, in



*AMNSIS Activism, Early 1980s. Rod Bishop.  
GDI Archives*

January 1978, formal discussions with the province began with a meeting between AMNSIS representatives and the Minister of Continuing Education, Donald Faris. Following that meeting, a series of meetings took place between government officials from the Department of Continuing Education and AMNSIS representatives in which various ideas and proposals were discussed. A working paper was produced by Continuing Education for discussion purposes, but since there was no consensus, discussions discontinued for a number of months. Finally, in early 1979 discussions resumed, this time involving a new provincial Minister of Education, Doug McArthur, along with staff from

the Social Planning Directorate, and AMNSIS representatives. A proposal, supported by all the parties, was developed, and a formal document, dated June 25, 1979, was submitted to the Treasury Board and to cabinet.

As then-Education Minister Doug McArthur notes, a Métis educational institution was an idea shared by many in AMNSIS, but it was Jim Sinclair who carried the vision forward. “Jim was quite committed to the idea of an education centre that would sustain and advance the cultural and historical identity of Métis people. Jim carried the energy around that

vision,” said McArthur. Jim Sinclair takes a more humble stance, attributing the success to community people. “All those organizations [like GDI] were not set up by one person. Don’t ever get the idea that one person did it. It was done through the blood and sweat of all the people who came to those demonstrations and occupations.”

Roger Butterfield notes the important effect that the activism had on decision makers: “The government of the day really wanted to do something to assist the Métis people, but they didn’t know what to do, and they didn’t know how to do it. They needed a reason to do what they did.” Part of that reason came out of the demonstrations. “In those days, it gave the politicians the reason to go forward.” As he notes, “Politicians are vote-conscious people,” and he cites public pressure to deal with the Métis as part of the reason that the politicians moved forward—“People didn’t want to see the Métis in the Legislature all the time demonstrating.” All that demonstrating and activism resulted in a willingness to talk about developing the Institute, to engage in the process. “It opened the door and made the development of GDI a little bit easier.”

Murray Hamilton suggests various individuals to whom credit is due for the Institute’s formation

and for getting it up and running. He notes that MSS/AMNSIS Executive Director, Bruce Flamont played a big role in laying GDI’s groundwork. Fred Storey, a MSS consultant, assisted Bruce Flamont in much of this groundbreaking work. Murray Hamilton notes, “There were ongoing discussions with Dr. Lloyd Barber from the University of Regina [U of R]

*“The government of the day really wanted to do something to assist the Métis people, but they didn’t know what to do, and they didn’t know how to do it.”*

*~Roger Butterfield*



*Bruce Flamont, AMNSIS Executive Director,  
New Breed Magazine, March-April 1979, 5.*





Wayne McKenzie,  
*New Breed Magazine*, December 1981, 10.

about the creation of a Gabriel Dumont College that included an internal debate about whether there would be a Gabriel Dumont College affiliated with the U of R or a stand-alone institute. The latter scenario prevailed with the creation of GDI.” Bruce Flamont worked on the GDI file until he ran for Area Director and won in the AMNSIS election. Wayne McKenzie was then hired as his replacement.

Jim Sinclair also mentions Bruce Flamont as an important bureaucrat involved on the Métis side. As for outside people, he notes, “Fred Story was an advisor. He helped a lot. He was non-Aboriginal. He really helped a lot.” Jim talks about the MSS/AMNSIS Vice-President, Napoleon Lafontaine, as being “instrumental” in getting GDI up and running. He says, “If you want

to give anyone credit, you want to give ... Nappi LaFontaine the credit for really spearheading this, for getting everybody on board. Him and I sat down and discussed it so much right from the late '50s when we used to be still boozing and in the early '60s, when we started to organize politically.”

Also, people in government worked to ensure that the formation of the Institute moved forward. People like then Minister of Education, Doug McArthur, who is described by Murray as “progressive, decent, a Rhodes Scholar. Really just a decent individual.” Wayne McKenzie and Jim Sinclair both mention Doug McArthur as well as Gary Wouters, a civil servant and early GDI Board member, as representative of the provincial government, and Bob Barshell, also a civil servant. Murray makes an interesting observation about the Blakeney government at the time. He says, “Blakeney gave us money even though he knew the Métis would still fight with him. He still gave us money because it was the right thing to do. They understood social justice.”

Wayne McKenzie similarly gives credit to people in government. He says, “If Doug McArthur and Gary Wouters wouldn’t have been the point men—well let me put it this way—some ministers were there just to keep you at bay and some were there to legitimately help us. Some were almost racist. But Doug McArthur, even though we were there to fight for what we

wanted, he kept his word. We wouldn't have got GDI without that." Jim Sinclair gives similar credit.

Doug McArthur recalls that Aboriginal education was a general priority of the Blakeney government at the time. Personally, he believed that Saskatchewan's future was "very much tied to the future of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal youth." He also believed the government had an obligation to serve the needs of Aboriginal people. When he became Minister of Education, he states that he was compelled to make Aboriginal education a priority. He felt there was a good fit between what he wanted to do and what the Métis wanted to do. "The early to mid-70s was a time when there were a lot of things that spoke to conflict," he says. Even while there were unavoidable tensions between the government and the people, "underneath it all there was a sense of broad common purpose."

Murray Hamilton counters this example with the legacy of the Devine government, which came into power in 1982. "The moment the Métis attacked the Devine government, they cut funding [to AMNSIS]. Sinclair attacked at the '87 constitutional talks and Devine immediately cut core funding to AMNSIS." Political Scientist Howard Leeson notes that at the 1987 national conference on Aboriginal rights that occurred prior to the Meech Lake constitutional talks, Devine was "lectured by the leader of the



Fred Storey,  
*New Breed Magazine, July 1977, 5.*

*"Blakeney gave us money even though he knew the Métis would still fight with him. He still gave us money because it was the right thing to do"*

*-Murray Hamilton*

association of Métis and Non-Status Indians in Saskatchewan, Jim Sinclair, on national television about his unwillingness to approve self-government for Aboriginal peoples."<sup>27</sup> Leeson describes this event as "a public relations failure" for Devine.<sup>28</sup> Jim Sinclair says, "We raised hell with all of Canada through the Premiers and the Prime Minister and, you know, told it like it is, which I still feel was the right thing, [but as a result] we lost all our money." He goes on to say, "We lost every cent of our funding. But the funding stayed with the institutions ... it was just our [AMNSIS] core funding. ... It didn't affect the Institutions." While the Devine government cut funding to the Métis political body, it is also noted by others that



Grant Devine, GDI Cultural Conference, 1991.  
GDI Archives

in the years that the Devine government was in power, GDI received more provincial money than it had ever received during the NDP administration. This may, in part, be due to the unprecedented spending debt accumulated in the Devine years, but the Institute did have its reputation to thank for the confidence shown by government, and despite the misfortunes of our Métis political body, GDI continued to thrive during those years.

A further example of the change in political tone that occurred with the Devine Progressive Conservative government is reported in a May 1986 document entitled *An Introduction to the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research*. In 1985, the Saskatchewan Department of Advanced Education and Manpower (DAEM) introduced a “Native Policy Statement” which indicated that the mainstream educational institutions would be the “main vehicle” for Native education and training. “In other words, less emphasis would be placed upon organizations such as the Gabriel Dumont Institute, which would be used only to fill ‘gaps’ not met by other institutions.”<sup>29</sup> This official policy statement by DAEM was met with concern as it was seen to threaten the basis for self-determination, suggesting Aboriginal people would be limited in their choice to attend an Aboriginal institution such as GDI. It also had the effect of signaling to the Institute that it had a long way to go before it would be considered on an equal level with other training institutions in the province.

There was some discussion initially about whether GDI would be an affiliate of the university along the lines of Luther College, or a more autonomous Métis post-secondary institution governed through a contract with the provincial government. Roger Butterfield notes that as the AMNSIS Director of Education, he put forward a one-pager suggesting a Métis educational institute be tied to the university as an affiliate or as a university program. Eventually, the direction of the AMNSIS Board and government pressure ensured that the Institute’s planning would move away from the university affiliate idea. “There was money to do a pilot and I think that was it—it was a financial issue,” says Roger Butterfield. “People

thought if they got it started then it would develop on its own.”

In 1979, an agreement was struck between AMNSIS and the Minister of Education to provide funding for the Institute’s initial development. It was agreed that the new institution would be called the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research. Wayne McKenzie reflects on how the Institute’s name was chosen and indicates that is had its origins in AMNSIS. “In those early days, every time we wanted to write a letter to government we

had to manually type in ‘Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians’ and the address, and so on at the top of the letter.” As a result, Wayne says they decided to start a letterhead for AMNSIS. They wanted to put a picture on the AMNSIS letterhead and had an internal debate about whether the picture should be of Riel or of Dumont. Ultimately, Gabriel Dumont was chosen for the letterhead “because he was a fighter.” Riel, it was reasoned, was a negotiator, but Dumont was the real fighter, “and in those days we had to fight for everything. If we wanted *welfare* we had to fight for it,” Wayne McKenzie exclaims. So the choice of Gabriel Dumont for AMNSIS carried over as the natural choice for a Métis educational institution for which they had to fight. As for the choice of the name, Darren Préfontaine writes, “As a leader of the buffalo hunts, a political activist, keeper of traditional knowledge, and as the military leader of the Métis people, Dumont will always be remembered for his fierce determination to ensure his people’s survival. Out of respect for Dumont and his legacy, the Métis and Non-



AMNSIS Letter,  
*New Breed Magazine, July-August 1985, 8.*



AMNSIS Logo,  
*New Breed Magazine*, November 1980, 3.

Status Indian people of Saskatchewan named their educational institute after him.”<sup>30</sup>

The initial GDI agreement accomplished a number of items, including establishing the Institute’s administrative structure and needs assessment components. The agreement also established the Institute’s research and curriculum development components, GDI’s community-based model, and the start-up funding necessary to implement the Institute’s first activities.

GDI’s goals were first and foremost “to support Native people in developing a knowledge of and pride in their history and culture. This is necessary to provide the basis on which they can build a positive cultural and personal self-image.

The Association believes this is the key to whether native people can take advantage of and/or develop their own social, educational and economic opportunities.” Doug McArthur notes that the cultural focus was especially unique to GDI. “AMNSIS had the vision that GDI would first and foremost be a cultural institution focused on sustaining and maintaining culture.

A lot of people in government did not understand the cultural aspect. They didn’t see the strength and breadth of what could be gained by being rooted in cultural knowledge.” They did not see how GDI was different from a community college, they did not understand the fundamentally important foundation that the cultural mandate provided, and there was the territorial anxiety of the community colleges to deal with as well.

Doug McArthur recalls that at the time there was huge resistance, both in government and the province generally, to the idea of Aboriginal-controlled institutions, even if people generally agreed that things needed



*Dumont College*,  
*New Breed Magazine*, August-September 1979. <sup>j</sup>25

# Official Opening of Dumont Institute

Monday, October 27, 1980



*Top: This time, we had witnesses*  
The agreement setting out the terms for the establishment of the Institute between the Metis and Non-Status Peoples and the Government of Saskatchewan was signed (r. to l.) by Walter Smishek, Minister of Urban Affairs; Jim Sinclair, President of AMNSIS; and Doug McArthur, Minister of Continuing Education. The witnesses were Kenn Whyte, Institute Director; Joe Amyotte, elder and first president of the Metis Society of Saskatchewan; and Patty Lou Racette, a SUNTEP student.



*Top: "Into the Eighties" as Patty Lou Racette, one of the first SUNTEP students, cuts the ribbon officially opening the Gabriel Dumont Institute with Joe Amyotte in the background. Symbolically, the President of AMNSIS and the Minister of Continuing Education held the ribbon.*



*Top: The Heads of two firsts*  
Ida Wasacase, head of the first degree granting "Indian" Colleges in North America, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, is snapped with Drs. Kenn Whyte and Walter Currie, the heads of the first Metis and Non-Status Indian institute at the post-secondary level in North America, during the Institute's opening.





*Dr. Kenn Whyte, Doug McArthur, Jim Sinclair, GDI Signing Ceremony, 1980 1. GDI Archives.*

to change. Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education was not widely supported—government people and the public were not convinced this was a good idea. “Even Blakeney wasn’t convinced,” said McArthur.

While the Institute’s cultural mandate was at the forefront of GDI’s purpose, it was by no means the single goal for Métis education. GDI’s leaders and founders envisioned a broad scope and reach for the Institute. Doug McArthur stresses that GDI was very much an AMNSIS plan—“they had the plan, not government.”

The original proposal indicates that the Institute would conduct historical, cultural, and sociological research; develop education programs and materials for use in both Aboriginal

programs and in communities and for cross-cultural programming; develop community education programs designed to strengthen cultural identification; enable Métis people to develop practical knowledge and skills; and develop a resource centre where materials, aids, and access to skilled help would be available to Aboriginal people.

In addition, GDI’s founders saw the Institute as a means to influence public perception and knowledge about Aboriginal people. A hallmark of the marginalized is to be ignored, misunderstood, and deemed irrelevant by the dominant group. It is clear by the Métis and Non-Status Indian aim of bringing about “increased understanding and appreciation of native culture among non-native people,” that the Métis and Non-Status Indians of 1979 felt this marginalization acutely. The objective of educating the non-Aboriginal



*Dr. Kenn Whyte, GDI Signing Ceremony, 1980 2. GDI Archives*

population about Métis history and culture, and our many contributions to Canada, remains important work for the Institute, and is often executed both overtly and subtly, including the development and delivery of cross-cultural workshops to employers as well as the integration of nearly 1,000 Aboriginal teachers through GDI's SUNTEP program into Saskatchewan's education system.

SUNTEP graduates have an effect on the schools, colleagues, and systems that they come into contact with. In the 1988 GDI Annual Report, Executive Director Chris LaFontaine predicted the effect that GDI graduates would have on mainstream society. He stated, "[GDI] graduates who enter into professional careers become our public relations people. They serve as visible examples of our success and will, in time, change the prevailing attitudes toward Native people."<sup>31</sup>

The initial establishment grant for the Institute was \$91,000. The contract dates were from January to May 31, 1980. The initial contract was to establish GDI's administrative structure, begin hiring staff and developing programs. During this period, Dr. Kenn Whyte was hired as the Institute's first Executive Director. He began working with GDI on a part-time basis



*Patty Lou Racette, GDI Signing Ceremony, 1980.  
GDI Archives*

on April 1, 1980. On May 1, 1980, Dr. Walter Currie was hired as the Assistant Executive Director. The head of the Library and Resource Centre, Sara Lochhead, was hired in early May, 1980.

An extension to the initial contract was negotiated to cover the period from September 1980 to March 31, 1981. The extension was worth \$295,000. This contract



*Dr. Kenn Whyte, GDI Signing Ceremony, 1980.  
GDI Archives.*



was signed on October 23, 1980, and included the mandate to operate in four areas: Research, Educational Resource Development, Library, and Community Consultation. During June, July, and August, staff were recruited and hired to carry out the mandated areas of the contract.

The Institute's Constitution was formally proclaimed on September 20, 1980. It had a vision which linked education and economic development to cultural renewal. The preamble states that there was a "realization by our people that our social and economic development is linked to the renewal of our culture. The Institute is one of the ways in which we seek to achieve this cultural renewal and development."<sup>32</sup> The preamble notes that there were a couple of questions commonly asked of our people at the time. One of these was, "What do you want anyway?" The constitution quotes Chief Dan George in a speech that summed it up best.



*Dr. Walter Curry, GDI Cultural Conference, Late 1980s. GDI Archives*

Chief George stated, "We want first of all to be respected and to feel we are a people of worth. We want equal opportunity to succeed in life, but we cannot succeed on your terms. We cannot raise ourselves on your norms."<sup>33</sup>

*"We want first of all to be respected and to feel we are a people of worth."*

*~Chief Dan George*

A second question, "Why don't you integrate into our culture?" is also answered by the Chief's words. He stated, "Now you hold out your hand and you beckon to me to come over. ... Come and integrate you say. But how can I come? I am naked and ashamed. How can I come in dignity?"

"I have no presents. I have no gifts. What is my culture that you value ... my poor treasure you can only scorn? Am I to come then as a beggar and receive all from your omnipotent hand? Somehow I must wait. I must delay. I must find myself. I must find my treasure ... Then I can walk across the street and I will hold my head high for I will meet you as an equal. I will not scorn you for your demeaning gifts and you will not receive me in pity. Pity I can do without ... my manhood I cannot do without."<sup>34</sup>

It is so clear from those early GDI founding documents, that culture, cultural pride, and cultural appreciation played a primary role in the

Institute's creation. Over the years, GDI's cultural focus and mandate has been a touchstone for Institute governors, administrators, and staff, to be returned to time and again.

In addition to the Institute's cultural mandate, it's clear that the early GDI founders and leaders saw the education of Métis and Non-Status people as closely connected to the aspirations of self-determination and self-government. As Richard Thatcher notes, "When setting its strategic priorities, [AMNSIS] placed the greatest emphasis on self-government and economic development, with education being viewed as an essential buttress to both."<sup>35</sup> The mission statement of the Institute is recorded in the preamble of the GDI Constitution, adopted September 20, 1980: "To promote the renewal and development of Métis culture through appropriate research activities, through the development of resource materials, through the dissemination of these materials and by implementing such programs and other services as may from time to time be advisable."<sup>36</sup>

At some point, a sentence was added that reflected GDI's desire to fulfill an important role in training Métis people for leadership positions to strengthen the self-determination aspirations of the Métis governing body. The additional sentence reads: "Sufficient Métis and Non-Status people will be trained with the required skills, commitment and confidence to make the AMNSIS goal of self-government a reality."<sup>37</sup> This sentence was later dropped from the mission statement, but reflects the key role of an Aboriginal educational institution in AMNSIS's larger governance objectives.

As Darren Préfontaine, another long-time GDI employee, notes in a paper called *Owning Ourselves: The History of the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Documents 1980-1996*, while the Métis understood that the foundation for an institution like GDI was to educate and train Métis people for self government, "the non-Aboriginal media tended to focus on the need for Métis and Non-Status Indians to educate themselves and thereby better integrate into the larger society."<sup>38</sup> In articles printed in the mainstream newspapers of the day no mention is made of the underlying desire for self-government. However, AMNSIS President Jim Sinclair specifically saw the Institute as a means to prevent assimilation.<sup>39</sup> The people were to be educated in order to take part in Métis self-governance, not to be subsumed by the mainstream. Chris Lafontaine, one of the Institute's early Executive Directors reflects, "The whole idea at the time was to establish all the institutions you would need for self-government. That was the whole motivation for all of it."

Jim Sinclair also makes the connection between the creation of Métis institutions like housing, the economic development corporation, and GDI to the issue of self-government and the constitutional talks in the 1980s.



*Prime Minister Trudeau and MNC National Representative Clément Chartier at FMC'83, Ottawa, Ontario, 15th March 1983.  
(Collection of Clément Chartier)*

He says that GDI and the other institutions were designed to support self-government. “Before we went to the constitutional talks, everything was ready. We had all democratic institutions. Part of Dumont Institute was the one-person-one-vote process. It was always about education—how to educate our people, both politically and academically, if you want to use that word.” The institutions were set up to operate democratically and to be a part of the larger picture of a democratically-structured Métis government. In addition, the delivery of education to Métis and Non-Status people was seen as a natural progression under the philosophy of democratic education. “Native people also claim the validity of their mandate to deliver education programming because the very nature of democratic education is that it cannot be delivered by someone else. The principle, simply stated, is that education in a democratic society requires that those who receive it must participate in delivering it.”<sup>40</sup>

A significant aspect of GDI’s vision, and for all Métis and Non-Status institutions developed under AMNSIS, was the role of the grassroots in its development and direction. The community itself was the most important driver for what would go on at the programming and service level. The grassroots role in the AMNSIS governance structure cannot be understated. As Clément Chartier notes there was always a big push

from the community level for decentralization—for communities to be part of the governance and for the decision making to be as close to the people being served as possible. Jim Sinclair recalls the grassroots pressure he faced to get education in the communities. He says, “I had ... as many as a hundred people come in to my office and raise hell with me and say look you’ve got to get this done—we’re here and we want answers.”

Part of the local level involvement meant a strict focus on democratically-elected and run organizations and institutions. As Jim Sinclair notes, “We wanted a democratic process. We really wanted people to speak up.” The election of representatives to the boards of the new AMNSIS institutions meant that the grassroots would have a voice at the board tables where decisions were made. Chris LaFontaine points out, “[We] had to keep the institutions democratic. [We] also had to make sure [we] responded to the community needs, not the government directives.” It was a balancing act between meeting the needs of the communities and fulfilling the accountability expectations of funders.

Many people today may take for granted that we have a Métis cultural and education institution, but at the time the Institute was established, resistance to the idea was enormous. As Doug McArthur notes, the idea of an Aboriginal-controlled educational institution was almost unheard of and was not popular. He says, “To talk in terms of Aboriginal people having their own institutions controlled by them was not politically popular. It generated quite a bit of hostility.” He goes on to add, “There was a lot of skepticism about whether Aboriginal people could run and manage these things. People were operating on stereotypes. Even within my immediate government colleagues I had to do a lot of convincing.” Doug McArthur says that implementing the GDI agreement was one of the things that he had the most satisfaction and pride in from that period of time. “This was not what most people saw as a natural next step in Aboriginal education.”

Many people link GDI’s establishment to the militant actions that the Métis were involved in the 1970s and early '80s. The Métis blockaded roads, took over meetings, occupied offices, held sit-ins. “Every week



*Christopher LaFontaine,  
Late 1980s. GDI Archives,*



*The AMNSIS Delegation in front of House of Commons in London, New Breed Magazine, May 1981, 8.*

we were doing something,” says Wayne MacKenzie. He makes the point that there was no benevolent force simply handing over education to the Métis, but that the leaders at that time fought for GDI. “It wasn’t some government giving us something; we had to fight for what we wanted. We got the money for GDI because people respected us and because we fought for it. No one gave it to us because they were just good people. The NDP were afraid to have a meeting with themselves because we’d come in and disrupt it. We were rough and tough. We had no hidden agenda. We fought for our community—to make their lives better.”

Jim Sinclair similarly notes that the lobby effort for

GDI was not a straightforward or easy process. He says getting government officials to listen and to agree to Métis aspirations, including the concept of GDI “took many, many occupations of buildings in northern Saskatchewan like LaRonge, Buffalo Narrows—and the Legislature—a number of times—to the point where we put our tents there [on the lawn of the

Legislative Buildings in Regina], and the government turned on the water in front of the Legislative Buildings and tried to drown us; we moved inside the building and stayed there for days. We did that several times. We demonstrated on the same day in Yorkton, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, LaRonge, and Regina. ... We occupied those buildings so many times. ... We put that kind of pressure on the government,” says Sinclair.



*Napoleon LaFontaine, New Breed Magazine, December 1981, 15.*

Roger Butterfield recalls with a laugh, “There were some pretty hot times.”

In the negotiations to develop GDI, AMNSIS representatives held a number of meetings with government, and after each meeting where they received a “no,” they would strategize an action in response. Jim Sinclair says, “A number of Ministries were involved.

Gordon MacMurchy was the first guy to say ‘No No No No. No such a thing.’ But we kept meeting with him ... Napoleon LaFontaine met with him. Couldn’t get too far.” Chris LaFontaine recalls that in response to the continued “no” from MacMurchy, “we demonstrated against him in Cupar, his constituency. Right after that he became kind of a good supporter.” This

*“We were always strategizing about how to get a ‘yes.’”*

*~ Wayne McKenzie*

being told “no,” and were therefore always prepared to take action. “We were always strategizing about how to get a ‘yes,’” he says.

As Roger Butterfield notes, the demonstrations were not put on lightly, a great deal of planning went into each one. There were risks associated with demonstrating, people could get arrested—“It takes very strong people to do that.” People came from the north, they came from the rural communities, the Locals organized people, and there were many people in Regina who came out and demonstrated.

On the Métis side, Jim Sinclair recalls some of the main people involved. “The main people who were in that [setting up/ negotiating GDI] were Nap LaFontaine, Jimmy Favel; Wayne McKenzie was really



*Napoleon LaFontaine, GDI Regina Library, Late 1980s.  
GDI Archives*

must be what Wayne McKenzie means when he says they always went into the meetings with a plan, a counter-strategy, for what to do if they received a negative answer. They anticipated



*Jim Favel, Early 1980s.  
GDI Archives*



*Wayne McKenzie and Jim Sinclair,  
New Breed Magazine, February 1981, 23.*

strong on it. All our board pretty well was on board on that. There was no one that was against it.”

In addition, Jim Sinclair recalls that the mainstream community colleges and technical institutes put up some fierce opposition, going so far as to attempt to co-opt the Métis community into opposing GDI’s establishment, particularly in the Prince Albert

area. In the early 1980s, there were a number of community colleges in the province as well as four technical institutes operated by the province. The technical institute in Prince Albert “came back and told the [Métis] people we’ll give you and your district a lot more money so you can have more programs for your people at the community level or at the Prince Albert level.”<sup>41</sup> The AMNSIS representatives had to deal with the Prince Albert Métis Locals resisting the idea of creating GDI. Jim Sinclair says, “I tried to



*Christopher LaFontaine,  
GDI Cultural Conference, Late 1980s.  
GDI Archives*

convince them that we should not let government control our education institution. We have to control it.” Chris LaFontaine recalls some of the many meetings that were held: “At the time they were trying to deal with the resistance, and they were talking through how do you deal with Prince Albert, how do you deal with the backlash from community colleges, the technical institutes and those types of things.” He also notes that the issue was based on scarce resources. “The

community colleges knew that [setting up GDI] was going to take part of their money. At the time, the technical institute was struggling because everybody was looking for money.” Jim Sinclair says, “We had a struggle with that.”

The stories of the veterans of the '70s and '80s Aboriginal politics make one realize that no one today should take GDI's existence and Métis-specific education for granted—it was a struggle and a hard-won battle to establish our educational institute.

In its early years, GDI had to perform well in order to gain acceptance. Doug McArthur notes that there had to be some success in order to build credibility, and GDI made an impression in its early years. Amongst professional circles like librarians, educators, archivists, and government people, respect and support grew for the Institute's work. "By working with GDI, these professionals became supporters of



*Dr. Kenn Whyte,  
New Breed Magazine, July 1981, 6.*

its existence. This support has a way of working its way into the wider community," said McArthur. Wayne McKenzie notes that the Institute was run very well from a management point of view. The first Executive Director, Kenn Whyte, and Assistant Executive Director, Walter Currie, "Became the stabilizing force." Building this kind of professional respect helped protect GDI down the road through its ups and downs.



*Dr. Walter Currie,  
Early 1980s. GDI Archives*



## 4 Early Directions

Early programs developed and offered by the Institute were in response to community circumstances, and included offerings in the social sciences—such as teacher education, Métis social work, and Native Human Justice. These first programs were very much a response to the needs of the Aboriginal community to address the issues of the day. Over the years, as the Institute matured, there was a shift toward training based on labour market demand. This shift has been heavily influenced by the nature of government funding to the Institute. Most training funding that the Institute receives today requires demonstrable links to the labour market.

GDI's first services and programs included curriculum development and research, the library and resource centre, the field liaison program, and the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP). The first contract establishing GDI called for the Institute to operate in the following four areas:

1. A Research Department responsible for all cultural, historical, and sociological research and evaluation.
2. A centralized Library and Resource Centre responsible for cataloguing and organizing all research materials, for obtaining the necessary books, articles, videos, audio and visual aides, and for developing a lending system.
3. An Educational Resource Development Department to develop educational materials to be used in the education system.
4. A Community Consultation Program designed to share the results of the Aboriginal and Land Claims Research dealing with Métis history, culture, land claims, and Aboriginal Rights with local Aboriginal people. This program was completed March 31, 1981, and future funds were to be made available to provide permanent field services for the Institute.

A fifth potential area of work for the Institute was also identified in the contract as a Community Education Department. The role of such a department was to be the topic of on-going negotiations with the Department of Continuing Education. This clause reflects the desire of the communities to have community-based adult education opportunities much like the role that the Dumont Technical Institute (DTI) plays today. It would take a full 12 years from the signing of this first GDI agreement to evolve the DTI model of community-based skills training programming that exists today.



*The Dumont Liaison Workers,  
New Breed Magazine, April 1981, 13.*

In addition to these four areas, the SUNTEP agreement was negotiated and funded under a separate agreement and run as a separate GDI program. From 1980 to 1994, SUNTEP was overseen by a management committee, which is described in more detail in the SUNTEP section. The SUNTEP program had two

primary goals. First, the program would help ensure that Métis and Non-Status Indians would have opportunities to earn teaching degrees. Second, the program would graduate teachers who would be culturally sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal students and who would function as role models for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

In 1980, GDI established three distinct departments under its funding agreement: Research and Educational Resource Development, Library and Resource Centre, and Community Consultation.

The Research program's goals included conducting research on the history of Métis and Non-Status Indian peoples of Saskatchewan. The unit also conducted primary and secondary research into the contemporary cultural, social, economic, and political circumstances of the Métis and Non-Status Indians in Saskatchewan—research that is acknowledged as important to both the Aboriginal peoples' movement in general and as

support for other GDI units, particularly program development. Clément Chartier recalls that the research component was significant. He says, "Part of the push for GDI was research—our histories, our stories, to do research on our rights."<sup>42</sup> There is no question that the Research Department



*GDI Staff, 1981. GDI Archives*

was one of GDI's primary aspects in its early years.

The GDI Library worked toward obtaining materials such as books, videos, magazines, government documents, photographs, rare books, and archival documents. One of the original goals of the GDI Library was to build a collection of original materials directly related to Métis and Non-Status Indian history and culture. The collection began with Aboriginal rights materials, materials resulting from archival research, and materials produced through the Institute's research program. Library staff also recognized a gap in library systems for the organization of Aboriginal materials. One of the projects for the GDI Library was the



*GDI Students in Library, Late 1980s.  
GDI Archives*

organization of subject headings and other finding aids to help with this problem. The GDI Library's main branch was in Regina with Saskatoon and Prince Albert considered resource centres. Other resource centre locations were Lloydminster, Île-à-la-Crosse, Fort Qu'Appelle, Melfort, Esterhazy, and Buffalo Narrows.

*There is no question that the Research Department was one of GDI's primary aspects in its early years.*

study guides, and Native Studies materials for teaching in the Institute's community-delivered programs.

In the Institute's early years, it did not develop strategic plans per se, but very much understood where it was going. The very first GDI Cultural Conference in September 1980 resulted in a number of resolutions that clearly indicated a direction for the Institute. A number of resolutions came out of that conference including several focused around the Non-Registered Indian and Métis (NRIM) program (later renamed Non-Status Indian and Métis, or NSIM, program) and resources. NRIM was a source of

The Curriculum Department was responsible for developing educational materials for use by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers. The materials produced by the Curriculum Department in the early days included filmstrips,



*NRIM Students Protesting, New Breed Magazine, May-June 1976, 9.*

contention at the time because these were seen as education resources that were tied up in the bureaucracy and control of non-Aboriginal institutions, namely the community colleges. Chris LaFontaine notes the resistance by the community colleges was “because community colleges didn’t have any money so they needed the NSIM money to put on programs.” AMNSIS wanted control of NRIM transferred to GDI so that the Institute could use those funds to develop curriculum and put on courses relevant to the communities.

The provincially-funded NRIM program was significant because it provided tuition, books, and living allowances for Métis and Non-Status Indian students similar to those provided under federal initiatives for First Nations students. Clément Chartier recalls taking advantage of NRIM to attend law school in the mid-to-late '70s. He also recalls the animosity over the program being phased out by the provincial government. Students fought against its removal, and put pressure on the Métis and Non-Status political structure to fight for their education. “There was a big push on the Métis Society to make sure schools were going to be there for Métis students,” he says.

The resolutions from the 1980 GDI Cultural Conference illustrate the large role that the Institute was to take. GDI was to conduct a number of tasks from working to ensure adequate training allowances and travel money for students, to developing curricula for training programs that would

prepare community members for roles in local government, program committees, and the education system. GDI was to establish training centres throughout the province, develop cross-cultural education programs, and was to have a role in the development of separate Aboriginal schools.

During the Institute's first 14 years, the cultural conferences provided GDI with grassroots direction while facilitating community knowledge and celebrating Métis culture. The early GDI conferences were attended by up to 1,000 people from all over the province and beyond. Provision for the conferences was made in the

Institute's Constitution, which stated, "The Institute shall hold an annual educational conference or workshop dealing with a topic or topics related to Native education and studies and which is relevant or vital to the interests of Native people."<sup>43</sup> GDI held the large annual cultural conferences from its inception in 1980 until 1994 when a financial crisis struck the Institute and necessitated that the conferences be put on an indefinite hiatus. Over time, the Institute's direction changed from the direct input of the grassroots at the conferences, which essentially discontinued after 1994, to a focus on board development and leadership. After an 11-year hiatus, and to celebrate

its 25th anniversary, GDI held a cultural conference in 2005—the first since the troubles of 1994. Five years later in 2010, GDI hosted another cultural conference in celebration of the Institute's 30th anniversary. At both the 2005 and 2010 conferences, GDI re-



*Roy Romanow, GDI Cultural Conference, Early 1990s. GDI Archives*



*Dancers, GDI Cultural Conference-Early 1990s. GDI Archives* 41

introduced the awarding of the *Order of Gabriel Dumont* medals.

Strategic planning documents demonstrate an increased focus and interest in developing the Institute's governance, which has been a priority since the early 2000s. Current practices also include seeking the direction of the Métis members in a number



*GDI 30th Anniversary, November 2010. GDI Archives*

of ways such as DTI and the Gabriel Dumont Institute Training and Employment (GDIT&E)'s annual province-wide community consultations for needs assessments. Furthermore, since 2004, GDI has hosted an Annual General Meeting at which its members have the opportunity to make resolutions and provide direction to the Institute.

In 1986, the Institute's first formal strategic plan emerged. The Institute wanted to continue to offer and expand its early core services, including Research and Development, the Library, SUNTEP, and the Native Studies program. The Institute and the Métis and Non-Status people continued to be concerned with the poor results from the K-12 system and, as such, set the direction to establish a separate Aboriginal school system. Where numbers warranted, GDI was to seek powers similar to those of



*Andrea Menard, GDI 30th Anniversary, November 2010. GDI Archives*

the existing separate school jurisdictions in order to establish educational delivery capacity for Aboriginal people within the K-12 system. In 1988, the Institute produced a paper titled *A Native Controlled Education System in Saskatchewan* that analyzed the issue. It proposed Aboriginal-controlled education as a means to help improve the dismal outcomes

*It was reported that 83.1% of Aboriginal students completing grade 8 did not complete grade 12.*

Aboriginal people faced from the mainstream education system, such as those reported from the larger centres: Saskatoon, Regina, and Prince Albert. It

was reported that 83.1% of Aboriginal students completing grade 8 did not complete grade 12.<sup>44</sup> The plan proposed that GDI would negotiate and enter into an agreement with the Northern Lights School Division and Saskatchewan Education to deliver educational services in northern communities. In southern communities, GDI was to seek powers similar to those of existing separate school jurisdictions to establish a K-12 education system for Aboriginal children. The plan also called for the development of a Saskatchewan Native K-12 Education Commission. Ultimately, the goal to establish a separate Métis K-12 system never came to fruition for the Institute since there was never any funding to pursue this goal.

In the realm of adult education, the 1986 strategic plan sought to establish Native Community Colleges under a system of local boards and a provincial technical school board. This goal harkens back to the original GDI agreement and the Community Education Department that was envisioned from the Institute's beginnings. The seeds of what would become DTI are evident in this strategic goal.



*GDI 30th Anniversary, November 2010. GDI Archives*

The Institute developed numerous strategic plans over the years, and these reflect the prevailing concerns of the day. Most recent GDI strategic plans include a renewed focus on culture, which was not always articulated in the planning documents even though it was always a focus. The 2010 strategic plan ensures that the Institute's cultural mandate is more prominent in that its first goal is "the promotion and retention of Métis culture will be a cornerstone of all Institute activities." Other important goals for GDI that have emerged in recent years include the desire to be recognized by the province in an act of legislation, the long-term goal of developing a Métis Centre of Excellence for Saskatchewan, and a focus on strengthening the Institute's governance.



## 5 SUNTEP

SUNTEP developed in a parallel process to GDI. At the same time that GDI was being negotiated and organized, discussions were underway to establish a Native Teacher Education Program for the southern part of the province. The precedent for SUNTEP came in the form of NORTEP, which was set up to train teachers for the North, where approximately 80% of the student population in the public school system was Aboriginal. In addition, the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) was run by the University of Saskatchewan, and was designed to train First Nations teachers to teach in First Nations schools. In January 1982, *New Breed Magazine* reported that while NORTEP was first looked upon by government with skepticism when it began in 1976, it had since proven itself with a 75% retention rate and total of 26 graduates in its then six-year history.<sup>45</sup>

Initially, SUNTEP, which was to have its own administration and support services, was to be negotiated under a separate arrangement from the rest of GDI. However, with the successful conclusion of negotiations for GDI's establishment, it was decided that it would be more efficient to bring the two programs under one management, administration, and support service system. However, it was decided that funding for SUNTEP would be provided in a separate funding agreement. Also, SUNTEP's management and oversight was to be the responsibility of a separate committee with representatives from GDI, the Department of Education, the two universities, and the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Later, a representative of the Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association was added.<sup>46</sup> In the Institute's early documents, there is reference to the SUNTEP Review Committee, which presented a report in each of the GDI Annual Reports until the restructuring in 1994, at which time the size of the GDI Board was greatly reduced, and SUNTEP's oversight came under the general oversight of the GDI Board as a whole.

In some of the Institute's historical documents, the SUNTEP program, which we know today as the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program, is referred to as the "Southern" Native Teacher Education Program.<sup>47</sup> Lorraine Amiotte, long-time GDI employee, recalls the name Southern Urban Native Teacher Education Program being used in the early days as well. However early legal documents pertaining to SUNTEP use "Saskatchewan" in the name rather than "Southern." Perhaps the occasional practice of calling the program the "Southern Urban Native Teacher Education Program" grew out of the desire to differentiate the program and its objectives from the NORTEP program.

The initial three-year agreement for SUNTEP was signed on July 30, 1980 between AMNSIS President Jim Sinclair, the provincial Education Minister Doug McArthur, and Urban Affairs Minister Walter Smishek. McArthur is cited in a July 30, 1980 Regina *Leader-Post* article as saying that the advantage to having “native teachers for native students” is that “they understand the lifestyles and cultural backgrounds of the students and students can identify with them as role models.” At the time, Doug McArthur identified that there were “eight native teachers in Saskatchewan’s major urban centres out of a total teaching staff of 3,700,”<sup>48</sup> a discouraging number by any measure.

Both the Saskatoon Public and Saskatoon Separate school boards acknowledged at the time that they had difficulties hiring qualified Aboriginal teachers for urban schools. The Native Survival School on Broadway, now known as Oskayak High School, was set to open in the fall and the Separate school board was having difficulty attracting qualified teachers. “The majority of teachers of native ancestry seem to be trained to teach in native communities outside the city and the majority seems to have a preference to teach outside the city”<sup>49</sup> said Walter Podiluk, education director for the Saskatoon Separate School Board. Similarly, Merv Houghton, assistant superintendent of public secondary schools echoed these sentiments: “We would like to place teachers of native ancestry in our school programs now, but the difficulty is there are not that many qualified and for every one qualified there are a number of job opportunities.”<sup>50</sup>

*Both the Saskatoon Public and Saskatoon Separate school boards acknowledged at the time that they had difficulties hiring qualified Aboriginal teachers for urban schools.*

SUNTEP was structured with two major goals in mind. First, the program would allow Métis and Non-Status students the opportunity to gain a professional degree in education. As indicated in 1993, “Native students could either not access or had problems surviving in regular university programs. It was recognized therefore, that culturally sensitive training and basic skill enhancement were required to enable Native students to acquire their professional degrees.”<sup>51</sup>

SUNTEP’s second goal was to graduate a significant number of Aboriginal teachers for employment particularly in the urban school systems. These teachers would be role models to Aboriginal students who made up a significant portion of the student population in city schools.<sup>52</sup> The need for more Aboriginal teachers was made clear in an August 14, 1980 Regina *Leader-Post* article, which indicates that “a high percentage of

the 3,400 native students in Regina and Saskatoon schools are two to three years behind their proper grade-age level,” and a dropout rate of “well over 50 percent” before reaching high school.<sup>53</sup> The same article also indicates “only two of the 1,792 teachers in Regina are of Indian ancestry, with only a slightly better proportion in Saskatoon.”<sup>54</sup>

By August 1980, SUNTEP had received approval by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission (SHRC). SUNTEP was only the second affirmative action program to be approved by the SHRC, with the first being amendments to the commission’s own hiring policy.<sup>55</sup> The SHRC exemption allowed the Institute to specifically recruit Métis and Non-Status students into its programs and to its faculty and staff. The Institute maintains its Métis-specific hiring and student recruitment exemption to this day.

*The SHRC exemption allowed the Institute to specifically recruit Métis and Non-Status students into its programs and to its faculty and staff.*

Over the years, both GDI staff and Métis community members have articulated broader aspirations for the SUNTEP program, including the desire to expand it. This desire has taken many forms, from the call for

an additional SUNTEP centre to be opened in the province to the formal inclusion of secondary teacher training. In the 1987 GDI Annual Report, the SUNTEP Review Committee report indicates that the “expansion of the SUNTEP mandate, to include middle years and secondary education training, is high on the agenda for the future.”<sup>56</sup> The topic of SUNTEP as an elementary program gets SUNTEP Saskatoon Coordinator Murray Hamilton upset, to use his word. He says, “It’s upsetting that SUNTEP is promoted as an elementary program.” He notes that from his perspective and recollection, SUNTEP was never intended to be strictly an elementary program. He indicates that there is “a misconception about AMNSIS—they didn’t have it all figured out at that time—it was an evolving thing. There were essentially two issues: we didn’t have teachers and there were problems with the curriculum. We thought if we had teachers we could help the drop out rate and make curriculum.” Murray Hamilton goes on to say, “I can remember it like it was yesterday. The biggest dropout rate was at the high school level. Why would we set up SUNTEP like that, to be only elementary and middle years?” Regardless of the understanding or intention, SUNTEP appeared and operated enough like an exclusively elementary program for the 1987 SUNTEP review committee to report publicly that the “expansion of the SUNTEP mandate, to include middle years and secondary education training, is high on the agenda for the future.”<sup>57</sup> Similarly, a February 1985 report entitled *Stages of Group Support*

*Development in a Native Teacher Education Program* co-authored by Donna Scarfe, SUNTEP Regina faculty member and H.R. Lang of the University of Regina, indicates that the Regina SUNTEP program “is modeled on the Elementary Teacher Education Program of the University of Regina.”<sup>58</sup> Similarly, a 1987 evaluation of SUNTEP by Ruben Richert suggests an area for future development should include “more deliberate attempts to have SUNTEP students prepare for teaching in Secondary areas.”<sup>59</sup>

Today, SUNTEP Saskatoon ensures that all students who want to prepare to teach secondary school are able to pursue that goal. SUNTEP Prince Albert has a more difficult time with this because they are off-campus. Today, students who want to pursue a secondary teaching option through SUNTEP are able to do so in Saskatoon. This is very much an ad-hoc solution, and does not address the desire to increase enrolment or to formally expand the program’s secondary offerings across the board.

The effects of the SUNTEP program on both the Métis community and the general public have been the subject of much speculation, research, quantification, and study over the years. The Institute has always maintained the significant value of SUNTEP, culturally, socially, and economically. To those in both the Métis community and in the larger society, SUNTEP represents a sound investment and plain good practice. Over the years, GDI has felt the pressures of funding constraints in the post-secondary sector and felt the need to demonstrate its effectiveness on a number of fronts. In 1987, the Institute hired consultant Ruben Richert to conduct a review of SUNTEP’s progress, the first review to be completed involving SUNTEP graduates teaching in the provincial education system (a previous evaluation had been done before any of the SUNTEP students had actually graduated and moved into their professional careers as teachers). The SUNTEP review was needed in part as “a rejoinder to a surprisingly widely held misconception in some educational circles that a special needs program, such as SUNTEP, was no longer necessary or justified.”<sup>60</sup> The qualitative study interviewed 75% of the SUNTEP grads working in classrooms and found that by and large the SUNTEP graduates were competent and secure in their roles as teachers and drew upon their cross-cultural training in the classroom. The report concludes by noting that “In light of current provincial fiscal restraint, when special needs programs such as SUNTEP are erroneously regarded as expendable frills or fringes, this report concludes that the social costs of cuts to these programs are more expensive than the program dollars involved.”<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, over the years GDI has endeavored to demonstrate the savings to social programming that SUNTEP provides by producing periodic Update Reports. The 1996 SUNTEP Update Report states, “Before



## SUNTEP STARTS CLASSES IN PRINCE ALBERT

by Vi Sanderson

Prince Albert - Classes commenced September 14, 1981 for 15 first year students attending the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teachers Education Program (SUNTEP). "I'm certainly very pleased at how things are going. The work is interesting and enjoyable," said Jim Mireau, co-ordinator and professor of SUNTEP. The resident staff include Niel Sherwin Shields, Eva De Gostonyi, and receptionist Shirley Morin. Course studies include Math and English Update, English 100, Education Studies 100 and Native Studies 100. All are university accredited classes. Summer school is also scheduled for July and August 1982. SUNTEP students will receive a standard A teaching certificate at the end of three years. All students are from the Prince Albert area.

The students were interviewed and selected by the Area Education Committee set up by AMNSIS locals and

Dr. Kenn Whyte, director of Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research, a representative from the University of Saskatchewan and the SUNTEP staff.

Entry criteria include that the student be 21 years old and out of school for one year with either grade 10 upgrading or academic grade 10 or academic grade 12.

"We are planning on having our grand opening in conjunction with the Dumont Educational Conference in January," Mireau said. The students are also planning on publishing a weekly newsletter and hope to use the information to print a yearbook. "This is a class project; an editor and assistant editor will be designated," Mireau added.

The SUNTEP offices and classrooms are located at 54-10th St. E., Prince Albert, Sask., S6V 0Y5. Phone 764-1797. □



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*SUNTEP Starts Classes in Prince Albert,  
New Breed Magazine, December 1981, 36.*

entering the program many SUNTEP students were living in poverty and were either unemployed, working for low wages, or underemployed. After the successful completion of the program, SUNTEP graduates are able to secure employment in Saskatchewan's schools."<sup>62</sup>

More recently, the financial long-term impact of SUNTEP was quantified using a simple calculation that assumed the total number of SUNTEP graduates with a degree might earn about \$50,000 each per year. This is a modest calculation which can be easily adjusted for those graduates who may not be working or for those who may earn less or more than this amount. In 2010, the total number of SUNTEP graduates was 966. If

each of these 966 graduates on average earned \$50,000 per year, each year the SUNTEP grads would collectively earn \$48,300,000. At a combined provincial/federal tax rate of 32% they would return \$15.4 million back to governments in taxes each year. This represents an amazing return on the province's investment, which, as of 2010, funded SUNTEP at close to \$2.5 million per year. Of course, this calculation is not perfect, but it provides an example of how GDI staff have felt the need to try and justify the continued existence of this important program.

Perhaps more importantly, on the human side, the 966 graduates mean that as many as 19,000 students a day are receiving instructions from a SUNTEP graduate (assuming each teaches 20 students per day). That's a potential 19,000 students a day who are experiencing their education in a culturally sensitive and affirming way. As a result, more Métis and First Nations students will experience greater success and have more pride in their school endeavors, an outcome that is good for everyone in our province. Perhaps Richert summed it up best in 1987 when he noted, "The



*SUNTEP Regina 1981. Seated L to R: Theresa Fayant, Monica Goulet, Ray McKay, Lillian Daniels. Standing L to R: Joyce Toth, Calvin Racette, Peggy Galassi, Darlene Banin, Marlene Parisien, David Amiotte, Joanne Pelletier, Joy Amundson, Vonnie Desjarlais.*  
GDI Archives

impact of the graduates SUNTEP is preparing on children and other adults is difficult to calculate in dollars and cents. The role model concept is powerful.”<sup>63</sup>

The first two SUNTEP centres to open were in Saskatoon and Regina, which began classes in September 1980. Prince Albert began its first-year intake in September 1981. In an early, undated report on the progress

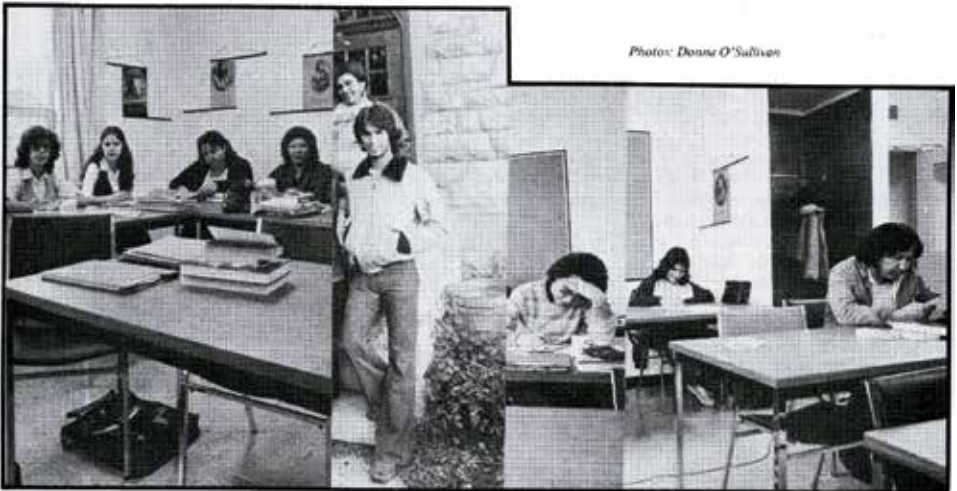
of the Institute, *An Update on Our Gabriel Dumont Institute*, Dr. Walter Currie reported that the SUNTEP program “has gotten off to an excellent start.”<sup>64</sup> He indicated that in September 1980, 27 students started the program at the two centres in Saskatoon and Regina, and of those 24 were remaining.<sup>65</sup> While this report is undated, it is clear that it was written only a few months after the start of the first SUNTEP classes. The 1981-1982 GDI Annual Report indicates that with the opening of the SUNTEP Prince

## *Regina and Saskatoon SUNTEP students*



*Regina Campus: (L to R) Seated: Martina Sayer, Brenda MacDonald, Rema Alexson, Allan Donald, Patty Lou Racette, Esther Cardinal, Hazel Arnold, Beverly Worsley. Standing: Terri MacPhail, Melona Palmer, Lianne Yuzicappi, Lynne Daniels*

*Saskatoon Campus: (L to R) Irene Clarke, Nora Corrigan, Marie Dumais, Mary Jane Jenkins, Randy Ledoux, Brian Gallagher, Marie Maurice, Jackie Bouvier, Dennis McLeod*



*Photos: Donna O'Sullivan*

*Regina and Saskatoon SUNTEP Students, New Breed Magazine, November 1980, 27.*



*SUNTEP Saskatoon Graduation, Mid-1980s.  
GDI Archives*

Albert campus in 1981, 52 new students were enrolled in SUNTEP in September 1981, in the three centres—Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert.<sup>66</sup>

The first group of SUNTEP graduates completed their program in the spring of 1984. There were 20 graduates: 13 in Regina and 7 in Saskatoon. Of the graduates, 8 completed with the qualification of Standard A teaching certificate and 12 completed with a Bachelor of Education degree. From SUNTEP Regina, the students completing with a Standard A certificate were Joy Amundson, Lianne Bird, Helen Kruszelnicki, and Martina Sayer.

Students graduating with their Bachelor of Education degrees were Rema Alexson, David Amyotte, Darlene Banin, Darlene Deschambault, Monica Goulet-Couture, Brenda Kinnon, Melona Palmer, Marline Parisien, and Joanne Pelletier. In

SUNTEP Saskatoon, the students completing with a Standard A were Brian Gallagher, Lorraine Joannette, Ingrid MacColl, and Marie Morin. The first Saskatoon SUNTEP students to graduate with a Bachelor of Education degree were Irene Clark, Edmond Lucier, and Marie Maurice.

This first group of graduates attracted a great deal of attention and several articles about them appeared in newspapers in the province. For instance, two articles by Ed Schroeter<sup>67</sup> appeared in the Regina *Leader-Post* in July 1984 highlighting the graduation of some of the first SUNTEP students, including Calvin Racette, who would later become GDI Executive Director in 2000. Brenda Kinnon's struggles to



*SUNTEP Student-Teacher, Late 1980s.  
GDI Archives*



return to school and complete SUNTEP are chronicled in one of the articles. While the articles at first glance appear to celebrate the success of the first SUNTEP graduates, they also reflect many of the prevailing attitudes and stereotypes of the time. The focus of



*SUNTEP Class, Late 1980s. GDI Archives*

the articles shifts from the hard-won success of the students' achievements to reflect undercurrents of stereotypically negative aspects of the students' backgrounds, including growing up with alcoholic parents who did not support education, having unemployed spouses, and the need for welfare. The articles also tend to focus on the price that the students paid for their achievements, including separation and divorce, rather than focus on the larger picture of achievement and what a program like SUNTEP might mean in the long run in terms of both social and economic outcomes. Unfortunately, the article on Brenda Kinnon focused not only on the toll education took on her marriage and family life, but also on her student



*SUNTEP Prince Albert Students, Mid-1990s 1.  
GDI Archives*

debt and the fact that she had not yet found a job, describing her as “debt-ridden and jobless”<sup>68</sup> and yet, Brenda Kinnon managed to get the last word, saying, “I’ve been down before. My education, they can’t take that away from me.”<sup>69</sup>

In the 1987 SUNTEP evaluation report, the program’s mandate is summarized based on the resolutions passed at the GDI Cultural Conferences between 1976 and 1985. SUNTEP’s direction is taken from the grassroots community and includes such points as ensuring that SUNTEP teachers must be prepared to teach from an Indian/Métis perspective at all levels of the education system and in both contemporary and traditional matters; SUNTEP teachers must be prepared to draw upon and work within the resources of their community; the SUNTEP teachers should be prepared to strive for close parent-teacher relationships and communication; and a high standard of performance for SUNTEP graduates was demanded



SUNTEP Prince Albert Graduation, 2010. GDI Archives

by the community.<sup>70</sup> The history and successes of the SUNTEP program over 30 years demonstrates that the program has not only fulfilled this mandate, but also in many respects has exceeded it.

One of the significant aims of the SUNTEP program, along with GDI in general, was to ensure that Métis and Non-Status people were trained to be citizens of the Métis Nation and to build Métis self-government. Training and educating people was a form of capacity building in support of the Métis Nation. A 1993 GDI document called *Philosophy of Education Aims* notes that “The students of the Gabriel Dumont Institute ... have the same vocation, and that is, to be citizens capable of governing themselves in a democratic state.”<sup>71</sup> Wayne McKenzie, AMNSIS Executive Director at the time that the SUNTEP and GDI agreements were established, notes that AMNSIS was fighting in those days for self-governing rights and they knew if they were ever going to see that happen they needed to set up institutions for education, economic development, housing, and so on. “So we got busy setting up the Dumont Institute, SNEDCO [now SMEDC], all that,” he says.

From the beginning, the community and the political body held high hopes for the SUNTEP graduates. Wayne McKenzie points out that the initial thought was that the GDI Board would eventually comprise entirely of the Institute's alumni. He says, "The people with university degrees should have taken over the governance roles for GDI." In fact, over the years, many SUNTEP graduates have served on the GDI Board alongside a variety of other Métis professionals and community representatives. Former NDP Cabinet Minister Pat Atkinson notes the spin-off effect from SUNTEP of developing professionally-trained Métis people. She says, "A lot of people went through the TEPs and it was a developmental process. The next generation went on to do other things, other kinds of professional degrees. Programs like SUNTEP absolutely changed the course of peoples' lives."

Wayne McKenzie notes that SUNTEP's set up was very much seen as a prototype with other sectors to follow. Education was just one sector that the Métis were striving to be involved in—it was the first and most obvious choice given the very real need and demand for Aboriginal teachers to be

*"Programs like SUNTEP absolutely changed the course of peoples' lives."*

*~Pat Atkinson*

in the schools and for the curriculum to change. Wayne McKenzie points out that from the SUNTEP model, there was an intention to develop similar opportunities for Métis people in a variety of sectors such as health care, and industries such as mining. To date, numerous opportunities in these types of sectors have been developed via DTI's technical and skills training programs, including a highly successful Practical Nursing program that has contributed nearly 200 Licensed Practical Nurses to the province's health system and apprenticeship and trades training that sees hundreds of Métis students trained each year. However, while GDI has delivered many certificate, diploma, and university-level courses over its history, SUNTEP remains the first and only permanent professional degree program delivered under GDI's auspices. SUNTEP's promise as a model for similar degree programs has not been fully realized, despite the Institute's best intentions and efforts over the years.

The role model concept as it relates to SUNTEP deserves special attention. The program's graduates act as ambassadors for the program in their roles as classroom teachers, administrators, post-secondary faculty, and other various professional positions that SUNTEP graduates fill. The anticipated role of the SUNTEP graduates is noted in the 1993 document *Philosophy of Education Aims* which notes that SUNTEP teachers were expected to "act as role models, resource people, counselors, as well as

teachers to children and adults of the Native and Non-Native people of Saskatchewan...Native students will be inspired to emulate their native teachers, and Native parents will identify much more strongly with school teachers and school systems that reflect their culture and their aspirations.”<sup>72</sup> As Karon Shmon, former GDI Executive Director and current Publishing Director, notes SUNTEP graduates are role models for all students as well as their colleagues. Drawing on her own experiences as a classroom teacher, Karon notes, “As a Métis teacher, I came to know that another side to my role was to ensure non-Aboriginal students, colleagues and parents saw a capable Métis teacher who could be a good influence on any student. The thousand [SUNTEP] grads have broken down a lot of preconceived notions and stereotypes.”

~Karon Shmon

Graduates of the SUNTEP program have gone on to fill roles in our society as educators, administrators, politicians, school principals, post-secondary faculty and administrators, government bureaucrats, community leaders, board members, and a variety of other roles. They have pursued further education opportunities such as graduate school or other degrees. In short, SUNTEP graduates have fulfilled the promise of Métis education. They are accomplished individuals who can be admired by the Métis community. In the SUNTEP centres it is not unusual to hear that the children of some of the early SUNTEP graduates are now enrolled in the program, and that even their grandchildren are attending SUNTEP—a powerful illustration of the positive intergenerational effects of education. There is no question, as Pat Atkinson so aptly put it, that SUNTEP has changed lives.

## 6 Native Studies Department —Curriculum Development

Today, GDI has a strong Publishing and Curriculum Department responsible for a number of activities, including producing audio, audiovisual and multimedia resources, books and posters from a Métis perspective; promoting and publishing the works of emerging Métis writers and artists; and ensuring a strong Métis presence in decision-making bodies affecting book publishing, education, and heritage issues. The Publishing Department makes up one of the core services provided under GDI's mandate.

GDI's original configuration included a Native Studies Department that included curriculum development activities. Early on, the work of the Native Studies Department included the development and delivery of courses for all Institute programs, including the modular Native Studies courses. They also developed workshops for schools and government departments. By 1981-82, the department had completed a Métis Awareness Materials package, a Non-Status, Indian and Métis information source book, and a few slide presentations.

This department was established to develop critically-needed resources for classrooms and educators. In the years leading up to GDI's



*Early GDI Publications. GDI Archives*

development, the political governing body for Métis and Non-Status Indians, AMNSIS, expressed a great deal of concern over negative misrepresentations of Aboriginal people in school textbooks, literature, and history books. There were very few resources by Métis people being written or published at the time. Producing materials written by Métis writers to fill the gap and provide a

Métis perspective was one of the key areas for the Institute to work on in its original mandate. As Darren Préfontaine indicates, “The Institute’s founders recognized that educational writing and publishing were the best means to instill a healthy respect for the contribution of Aboriginal

“... Métis people would gain more respect for their heritage when provided with a history of their people without the biased filter of Eurocentric historians.”

~Darren Préfontaine historians.”<sup>73</sup>

The promotion and preservation of Métis culture has always been of great importance to the Native Studies/Curriculum Department. In the 1980s, staff undertook an enormous image collection project to this end. They examined archives across Canada and purchased any and all photographs relating to the Métis. Some of these archives included the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, the Montana Historical Society, the National Archives of Canada, Glenbow Archives, and numerous provincial archives. Throughout the years, this collection of photographs has proven itself invaluable, as many have been reproduced numerous times for GDI projects.<sup>74</sup>

Many of the early writers for the Native Studies Department were the early SUNTEP graduates. Calvin Racette and Joanne Pelletier were both SUNTEP graduates and both produced some of the Institute’s groundbreaking books. Calvin Racette wrote the *Métis Development in the Canadian West Series* and Joanne Pelletier wrote the *Métis Historical Booklet Series* published in 1985. This series of six booklets “offered the first attempt by a Métis Curriculum Developer to analyze aspects of Canada’s past from a Métis perspective.”<sup>75</sup> Calvin Racette’s series “was the first GDI resource to be recommended on many provincial educational departments’ reading lists.”<sup>76</sup> Calvin Racette also wrote *Flags of the Métis*, the “only monograph that explains the historical



Early GDI Publications 2. GDI Archives

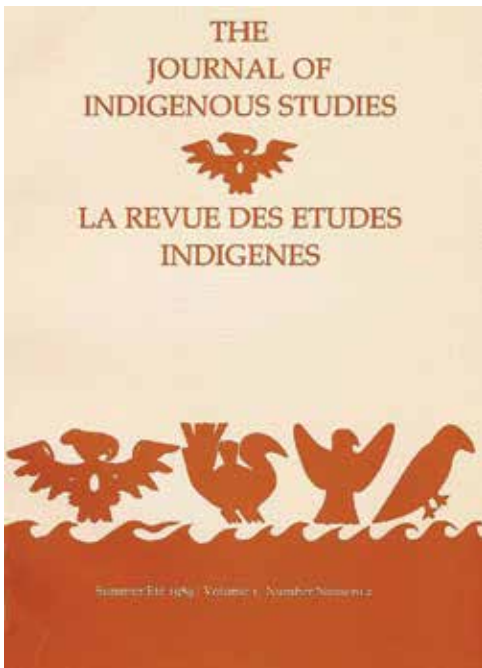
development of Métis flags. No other monograph has provided such an in-depth analysis of Métis patriotic symbols.”<sup>77</sup>

At the 1988 GDI Cultural Conference a new five-year strategic direction was mandated for the Institute. The Native Studies Department shifted its focus in response to the new direction. Up until that time, the focus had been on developing historical materials. Now, the Institute began to focus on the contemporary classroom and the needs of



Early GDI Publications 5. GDI Archives

Aboriginal children and of the school systems. The priorities for the Native Studies Department became Aboriginal language development, a K-12 Native Studies curriculum, children’s books, a new book on Métis role models and identity, work on Métis traditions, and a Métis war veterans’ book.



*Journal of Indigenous Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer, 1989 Cover. GDI Archives

In 1989, the Native Studies Department began publishing the refereed, semi-annual *Journal of Indigenous Studies*. The journal provided a vehicle for discussion, ideas, and scholarly research. Its focus was on international Indigenous issues. “The content included articles pertaining to Indigenous administration, anthropology, arts, ecology, education, ethnography, health, language, law, linguistics, literature, political science and sociology.”<sup>78</sup> In the mid-1990s it was thought that the Gabriel Dumont College (GDC) would take over the *Journal of Indigenous Studies* in order bring it into the academic setting of the university. Unfortunately, GDC

did not receive the kind of interest, support, or funding from the Department of Continuing Education that was hoped for at the time, and the plans to transfer the journal never materialized. The journal is now out of publication.

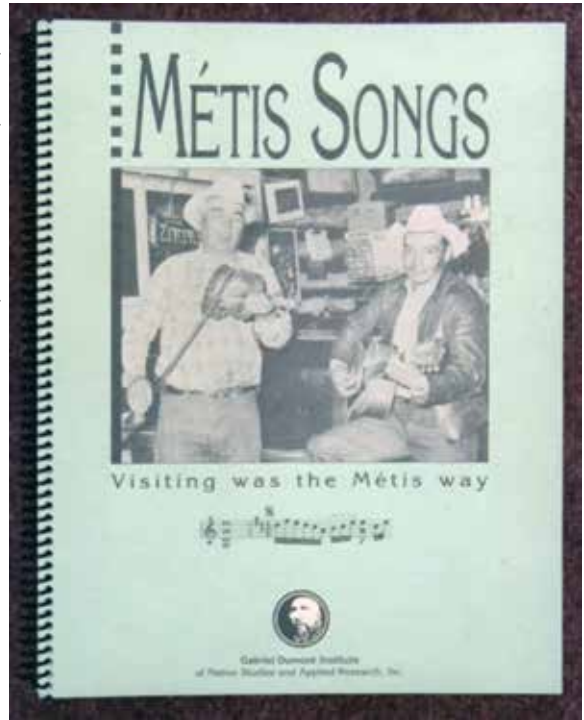
The shift from being called the Native Studies Department to the Curriculum and Publishing Department began to occur in 1992. In the 1992 Annual Report the title reads “Curriculum and Native Studies,” which is a change from previous reports that recognized this department as the

Native Studies Department. The shift toward curriculum and publishing was starting to occur at this point. As the report notes, “Now more than ever the public is demanding quality educational materials from a Métis perspective. The curriculum unit will meet this challenge in the coming years.”<sup>79</sup> Also in 1992, the department was being called on to contribute its knowledge and expertise to provincial curriculum. The Native Studies Department provided considerable input to Saskatchewan Education for the K-12 curriculum development by way of the Institute’s participation on the Indian and Métis Education Advisory Committee.<sup>80</sup>

*“Now more than ever the public is demanding quality educational materials from a Métis perspective.”*

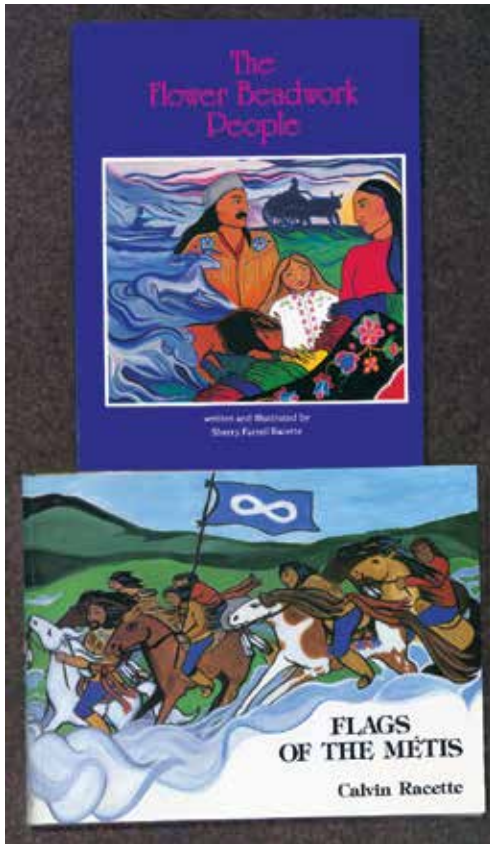
*~1992 Annual Report*

that led to its current configuration came about in 1993 when three GDI programs were combined to form the Core Services Division. Prior to this restructuring, GDI’s divisions had operated independently and with separate administrators. A more efficient administration was needed, which meant that the three departments—Curriculum Development, Research Development, and the Library—were rolled together under common GDI Core Services.<sup>81</sup> Subsequently, following the



*Early GDI Publications 7. GDI Archives*





Early GDI Publications 4. GDI Archives

the Institute during this time, and more recently, a series of her paintings depicting significant Métis historical events have been used to create *The Metis: A Visual History*—an educational poster set and companion book explaining the significance of each painting.

Throughout the 1990s, the Publishing and Curriculum Department remained focused on producing educational resources for teachers and schools. In addition, the 1990s saw the Publishing Department become more involved in multimedia resources.

In the later 1990s, the Publishing Department began to produce resources for post-secondary audiences and for the general population. It also became more involved in language preservation, producing many resources in the Michif languages, and it also became involved in documenting and promoting the languages.

In 2003, GDI's Publishing Department launched the *Virtual Museum of Metis History and Culture*, the richest source for Métis history and culture available on the Internet. The Virtual Museum receives approximately 130,000 visits annually, making it a significant resource for educators,

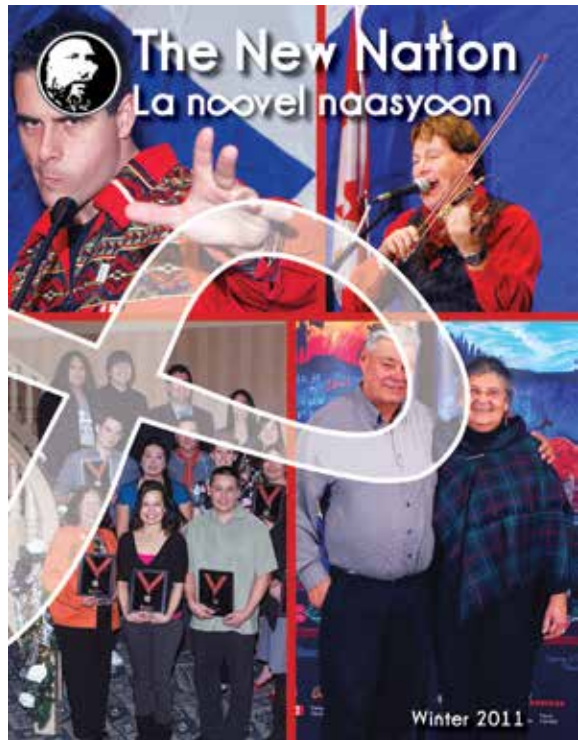
1994 layoffs, the Publishing and Curriculum Department relocated from Regina to Saskatoon. The Publishing Department took on some of the former work of the Research Department, which became integrated into GDI's overall functions after the 1993-94 restructuring.

In the 1990s, GDI focused on publishing culturally-affirming children's literature with the production of numerous popular and award-winning books. Many of the children's books produced in the 1990s were illustrated by artist Sherry Farrell Racette with her distinctive and colourful artwork, including *The Flower Beadwork People* (1991), which she also wrote and *Flags of the Métis*, written by Calvin Racette. Sherry Farrell Racette's artwork was also featured on two of the posters put out by

researchers, and anyone interested in Métis history and culture. Access to the Virtual Museum is provided freely to the public.

In recent years, GDI's Publishing Department has embarked on a number of initiatives to raise the Institute's public profile. In 2009, GDI launched its new magazine: *The New Nation: la noovel naysoon*. The magazine promotes Métis history and culture, the Institute's activities and programs, and the larger Métis community in the province. It also functions as a means to help GDI archive its many accomplishments, an outcome that has been proven valuable by experience with the *New Breed Magazine*, a magazine produced since 1970 by the Métis political body in the province. Today, GDI has an extensive digital collection of over 230 *New Breed Magazines* on the Virtual Museum. This collection functions as a significant resource. As Karon Shmon, GDI Publishing Director, notes, "This treasured collection provides a significant overview of Métis growth and achievement since it was first published in 1970. GDI is grateful to the Métis Nation—Saskatchewan for producing this invaluable record of our recent history." The GDI Publishing Department produces four issues of *The New Nation: la noovel naysoon* annually: winter, spring, summer, and fall. As Karon Shmon notes, "today's news and current events become tomorrow's history."

Furthermore, 2010 was the "Year of the Métis" in Saskatchewan, and that year provided GDI with the opportunity to promote the Institute's important cultural work and to raise public awareness of GDI and its many achievements. One of the Institute's strategic goals is to increase public awareness of its work and accomplishments. The Publishing Department took the opportunity that the "Year of the Métis" provided to partner with *Eagle Feather News*, a provincially-distributed publication, to produce a centre-page feature each



*New Nation, Winter 2011 Cover. GDI Archives*

month in 2010. The feature included articles and stories related to Métis history and culture, contemporary and archival photos, a Métis “Did You Know” feature, and a chronology of events related to the 1885 Resistance. Taken collectively, the yearlong feature contains a wealth of information about Métis history.

Today, the Publishing Department is one of the Institute’s key cultural components, producing print, visual, audiovisual, and multimedia resources for use in preschool to post-secondary education. GDI publications are regularly nominated and often win publishing awards, including several *Saskatchewan Book Awards*. Since 1980, the department has produced over one hundred Métis-specific resources. These resources help to provide a Métis perspective and help to balance one-sided and often inaccurate accounts of Métis history and culture. With this in mind, GDI’s Publishing Department has devoted significant energy to nurturing and promoting numerous emerging and established Métis artists and writers.

*“Today’s news and current events become tomorrow’s history.”*  
~Karon Shmon

In addition to the promotion of Métis culture, the Publishing Department continues the work envisioned by GDI’s founders: the preservation of Métis history, culture, and language by way of collecting and archiving relevant information and materials. The Institute’s various collections are showcased on the Virtual Museum, and it is hoped that someday the full collection might be displayed in a Métis “Centre of Excellence,” a long-term capital project that remains a dream of the Institute and many Métis people.



## 7 Scholarship Foundation

In 1985, the federal government, through the Regional Industrial Expansion Native Economic Development Program, granted GDI \$615,000 to establish and administer an endowment fund and scholarship program for Métis and Non-Status people in Saskatchewan. The total initial investment to the 1985 GDI Scholarship fund was \$600,000 with \$15,000 set aside for administration. Scholarships are awarded on the interest earned on the capital investment. Over the years, the capital investment has grown to \$1.25 million.



Alice Setka, Mid-1980s.  
GDI Archives

In October 1986, GDI entered into a trust agreement for the constitution of the charitable trust known as the *Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation*. The original trustees were Christopher LaFontaine, Alice Setka, Grace Hatfield, David Dombowsky, Terrence Connellan, and Napoleon LaFontaine.

The 1986 trust agreement sets out that the *Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation* will operate solely for charitable purposes. Its sole purpose and objective is the advancement

of the education of Métis and Non-Status people in Saskatchewan. Specifically, the foundation's activities are to grant scholarships to students according to particular criteria. The main scholarship administered

by the foundation was the *Napoleon LaFontaine Scholarship Fund*, which was established to encourage Métis and Non-Status students to pursue full-time education and training that enhanced the economic development of Métis and Non-Status Indians in Saskatchewan. The *Napoleon LaFontaine Scholarship* continues to be administered today.

On March 1, 2000, the 1986 trust agreement was terminated by agreement between GDI and the trustees and replaced with the charitable trust



Christopher LaFontaine, Early 1990s.  
GDI Archives

called the *Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation II*. The purpose of the *Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation II* continues to be a charitable trust to grant scholarships to Métis students in Saskatchewan enrolled in recognized academic programs relevant to the development of the Métis people in the province. The reasons for the change included the desire to broaden the terms of the *Napoleon LaFontaine Scholarship* fund. There had been an insufficient number of Métis students enrolled in programs related to the economic development of Métis people to fully disburse the scholarship funds. The new trust agreement opened an avenue where new awards could be contemplated in the future.



Grace Hatfield, Mid-1980s.  
GDI Archives

The 1986 trust agreement specified that the trustees must at all times be six in number and that the majority of the positions be held by Aboriginal people. In August 2009, the trust agreement was amended to specify five trustees. In addition, provision for gender equity is also included in the trust agreement—of the five trustees at least two must be Métis women. The trustees meet twice per year to administer the scholarships.

*In addition, provision for gender equity is also included in the trust agreement—of the five trustees at least two must be Métis women.*

The trust agreement ensures that all expenditures from the *GDI Scholarship Foundation* are devoted to the charitable purpose and to the objective of providing scholarships as set out in the criteria. Namely, the *Napoleon LaFontaine Economic Development Scholarship Program* sets out the purpose, eligibility, and criteria for various types of scholarships. In addition, the trust allows for other scholarships to be added provided the criteria are clearly articulated and appended to the trust agreement.

The trust agreement includes an investment plan for the *Napoleon LaFontaine Scholarship*, including the objective to maximize the return on the investment without jeopardizing or threatening the capital investment. It stipulates that the initial investment must not only remain untouched but that the amount must be supplemented from time-to-time as to reflect the real value in 1985 dollars of the initial investment. All investments are

in government guaranteed investments such as guaranteed investment certificates, treasury bills, or government bonds and are staggered to avoid interest rate fluctuations.

The Trust Agreement establishes the parameters for the *Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation II* and the *Napoleon LaFontaine Scholarship* in a way that protects the scholarship money from outside interests or funding crises.

The *Napoleon LaFontaine Scholarship Fund* is named after Napoleon



*Napoleon LaFontaine, Early 1990s. GDI Archives*

LaFontaine, a man instrumental in organizing AMNSIS, and who is often credited by former long-time AMNSIS president Jim Sinclair for much of the hard work that went into GDI's founding. Napoleon LaFontaine devoted himself to developing social and economic policies for Aboriginal people and the scholarships were named in recognition of his many contributions. Author John Weinstein credits Napoleon LaFontaine as a source of inspiration for Jim Sinclair during a dark period of alcoholism early in Sinclair's life. Weinstein calls Napoleon LaFontaine "a Métis Society local leader whose followers fought for their dignity with their fists."<sup>82</sup> It was under the influence of Napoleon LaFontaine that Jim Sinclair began organizing Métis and Non-Status people to fight for their rights, including education.<sup>83</sup>

Prior to the 1986 establishment of the *Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation*, two separate scholarship funds were established under GDI's administration in memory of two members of the Saskatchewan Métis community. The *Art Carriere Memorial Fund* was established in 1981 in memory of Art Carriere to provide a scholarship to an Aboriginal student entering his or her second year at GDI. Art Carriere dedicated many years of his life to improving conditions for the Aboriginal community in Saskatchewan; as a result, friends and colleagues established the memorial fund.

In 1983, the *Les Fiddler Memorial Fund* was established with interest from the fund to be used for a scholarship to a student entering his or her second year at SUNTEP Regina. Students receiving the scholarship are those who have contributed to the SUNTEP program and have shown academic progress as well as interest and commitment in the field of Aboriginal education. Friends and family who wished to memorialize Les Fiddler established the fund. Les Fiddler was one of the early Regina SUNTEP students, attending the program in 1981 as part of the second intake. He passed away shortly after the end of his first year following a short battle with cancer. He was 30 years old. Joanne Pelletier, who is today the SUNTEP Regina Coordinator, was his classmate at the time and recalls that he was a very good student and because of that, the scholarship was to be based on academic excellence. These two early scholarship funds, which in total account for just over \$40,000 in capital investments, have remained a part of the *Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation* since its inception.

In 1998, SaskEnergy made a five-year commitment to GDI to fund annual scholarships. After the initial five-year term was up, SaskEnergy continued to provide the scholarship funds to GDI on an annual basis.

*GDI Training & Employment Scholarship and Bursary Program remains the only example in Canada of a Métis-administered scholarship trust.*

In 2009, SaskEnergy and GDI signed a new five-year, \$50,000 agreement. Under the new agreement, Métis students entering or continuing undergraduate degrees or diplomas in select fields of study are eligible for the scholarship funds. In 2011,

the *SaskEnergy Scholarship* agreement was reworked to include a broader range of eligible programs of study as some of the previous criteria had made it difficult to administer all the funds annually.

While it was always possible under the terms of the trust agreement to increase the capital fund of the *Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation II*, it was not until 2008 that the capital fund was added to in a significant way. In 2008, GDIT&E submitted a proposal to Service Canada to





Tavia Laliberte, Dara Hrytzak-Lieffers, and Karen LaRocque,  
*GDI and Cameco Scholarship Announcement, GDI AGM*  
 30th Anniversary, November 20, 2010.  
 Peter Beszterda, *GDI Archives*

establish a scholarship/bursary program under the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement (AHRDA). The ability to establish a scholarship program existed within the AHRDA, which stated that “costs for the organization’s contribution to an endowment for a bursary program for post-secondary programs are eligible program assistance costs for the organization.” Following this section of the AHRDA, the Institute proposed to establish the *GDI Training & Employment Scholarship and Bursary Program*.

GDIT&E negotiated 1.3 million dollars to be invested in a scholarship fund for Métis people. This

capital investment was made directly to the *Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation II* thereby securing all the trust agreement’s protections and benefits, including the provision for government-backed investments and the maintenance of the capital investment in its 2008 dollar value. It is likely that GDI’s track record, along with the fact that the Institute had the mechanisms and procedures in place to effectively administer scholarships, contributed to the success of these negotiations. By comparison, other Métis Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement holders established similar scholarships, but all were administered by outside agencies such as universities or colleges. *GDI Training & Employment Scholarship and Bursary Program* remains the only example in Canada of a Métis-administered scholarship trust.

One of the *GDI Training & Employment Scholarship* program’s unique attributes is that it provides a fund for partnership leveraging related to scholarships for Métis people. This allows GDIT&E to seek out employer, business, and industry partners to cost share Métis-specific scholarships.

Under the terms of reference for the scholarship funds, the Institute seeks to form partnerships with businesses, industry, crown corporations, individuals, and others to develop targeted scholarship and/or bursary initiatives directly linked to labour market demand. The scholarship partnerships benefit employers by identifying high calibre Métis students studying in relevant fields, and Métis students benefit by the availability of a new Métis scholarship fund.



Bonnie Blakeley (Saskatoon Health Region) and Glenn Lafleur (GDI) signing GDI/SHR Health Scholarship Agreement, 2011. GDI Archives

The first scholarship established under this partnership leveraging arrangement was between SaskTel and GDIT&E in May 2009. The *SaskTel Métis Scholarship* is a three-year pilot project for joint funding of Métis-specific scholarships. It assists SaskTel in their recruitment and employee targets. The *SaskTel Métis Scholarship* recognizes the leadership, academic achievement, and community involvement of Métis students. The scholarship distributes \$16,000 annually to Métis students pursuing post-secondary accreditation in fields of study related to telecommunications. In addition, SaskTel provides career mentorship for award recipients and informs all award recipients of its summer employment opportunities.

In 2010, GDIT&E partnered with Cameco to recognize leadership, academic achievement, financial need, and the community involvement of Métis students pursuing post secondary accreditation in various fields including trades, business administration, commerce, and computer science. The four-year pilot project is cost-shared: 70% by Cameco and 30% by GDI. It has five awards each year amounting to \$1,300. Scholarship recipients gain a link to a large employer and the employer benefits by having access to Métis workers who are trained in areas relevant to Cameco's operations.

*The scholarship partnerships benefit employers by identifying high calibre Métis students studying in relevant fields*

Early in 2011, GDIT&E negotiated a third partnership for Métis scholarships with the Saskatoon Health Region. Under the deal, university

or technical students enrolled in degree, diploma, or certificate programs related to career opportunities with Saskatoon Health Region are eligible. The Health Region maintains a listing of hard-to-recruit jobs—students studying in these areas are eligible, as well as those studying management, nursing, therapies, and science and technology. The scholarship, a four-year pilot, provides for 17 scholarships of \$1,000 annually. Again, the scholarship has the effect of linking one of the largest employers in the province with Métis students studying in relevant fields.

Also established under the *GDI Training & Employment Scholarship and Bursary Program* is a Basic Education scholarship designed to assist Basic Education students in the transition from their studies to either the work force or to further training. Completion scholarships of \$500 are available to eligible students in their last month of their course to assist them with the transition from school to the next phase of their lives.

The *Gabriel Dumont Scholarship Foundation and Scholarship Foundation II* have provided scholarships to almost 2,000 Aboriginal students since 1986. In 2011, it is anticipated that the total amount of scholarships awarded by the foundation will surpass the million-dollar mark.



## 8 Research and Development Division

The Research and Development Division was in place from the Institute's outset. GDI's founding contract identified four primary areas for the Institute to work in, the first and foremost being research. It was structured to be responsible for all cultural, historical, and sociological research and evaluation. The Research Department was significant because it responded to the prevailing concerns that led to GDI's establishment, most notably that the Métis and Non-Status peoples' histories were misrepresented and misunderstood, partly due to a lack of accurate research. As the 1981-1982 GDI Annual Report notes "the task of gathering together the appropriate data and necessary information to develop research reports and curriculum materials is a laborious and time consuming one. It is further complicated by the fact that most secondary sources have either ignored much of the primary data on the Métis people or have just neglected to do the appropriate work necessary to gather the data and information."<sup>84</sup> The relative dearth of research information and data was a particular problem at the Institute's outset, and this was something that GDI tried to remedy.

By 1985, the Research Department had formally articulated its purpose, which was "to collect information and prepare analyses of information and issues of historical and contemporary relevance to the Métis and Non-Status Indian people of Saskatchewan in an effort to aid them in developmental processes aimed at ensuring their cultural integrity

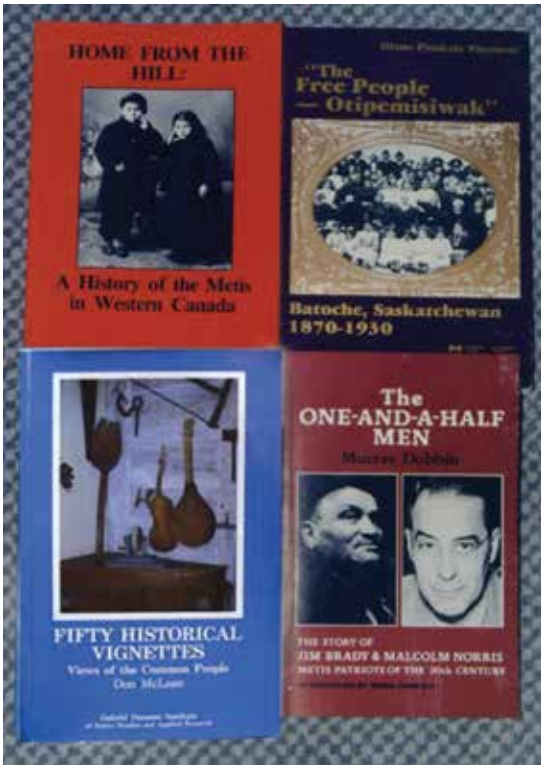
and improving upon their economic and social circumstances."<sup>85</sup> The Research Department's objectives were threefold: to conduct research relating to the history of Métis and Non-Status Indians; to conduct both primary and secondary research and to provide interpretive analyses of the cultural, social, economic, and political circumstances of Métis and

Non-Status Indians that would be of either immediate or long-term value; and to act as research support to other GDI units with an emphasis on the Institute's instructional programming.

Some of the activities undertaken by the Research Department included researching and writing a number of books about the 1885 Resistance from a Métis perspective. Some of the early books by the Institute include Don McLean's 1985 book titled *1885: Métis Rebellion or*

*"By the 1980s, many in society recognized the way in which Aboriginal people were portrayed in history and in school books was outdated and racist."*

*~Darren Préfontaine*



Early GDI Publications 3. GDI Archives

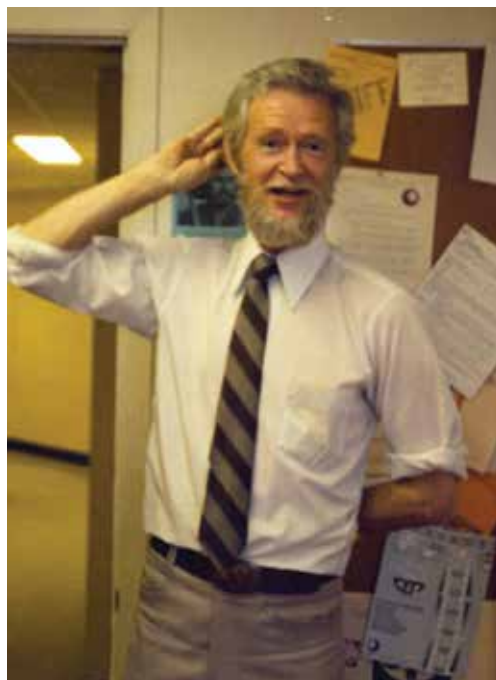
*Government Conspiracy?* Don McLean also researched and wrote *Home From the Hill: A History of the Metis in Western Canada*. Don McLean was a GDI Research Officer in the early 1980s and while not Aboriginal, he was sympathetic to Aboriginal concerns. As Darren Préfontaine notes, the Research Department's early publishing activities gained media attention. "By the 1980s, many in society recognized the way in which Aboriginal people were portrayed in history and in school books was outdated and racist. Furthermore, there was a recognition that Aboriginal people should be allowed to describe their historical and

contemporary experiences."<sup>86</sup> Don McLean was interviewed in the media about his 1885 book. He stated that its premise was that the Macdonald government conspired to foment the 1885 Métis Northwest Resistance. He stated that the Prince Albert Colonization Company was privy to inside information on the location of the Canadian Pacific Railway and therefore potential future land values. The media reported on McLean's assertions, saying, "He pointed out the Métis had lived on the land long before the colonization company got it, and yet the company would not give them any title to it."<sup>87</sup> The resources produced by the Research Department, with their Métis-specific perspective, were beginning to draw public attention.

The Research Department also tried to encourage all Institute staff to conduct relevant primary historical research about Métis and Non-Status Indians. In this way, GDI was structured as a groundbreaking organization with all staff committed to, and grounded in, a common purpose: to ensure accurate representations of Métis and Non-Status Indian history and culture. Institute staff had the unique opportunity to build their research skills in the pursuit of this shared objective.

The Research Department also collected and analyzed labour market, censuses, and other available data for education and training program

planning for the Institute as a whole. Staff conducted needs assessments in Métis communities to determine the training required by the labour market. Such community-based programming was an important function in the department's early years, and it provided a steady source of funding for various training projects. As discussed in *Owning Ourselves*: "Before a GDI program could be implemented in a particular locale, a thorough needs assessment was conducted, and almost simultaneously the Research Department would write funding proposals to various levels of governments and corporate agencies. Without an active Research Department, the Institute



*Don McLean, Mid-1980s. GDI Archives*

likely would not have survived its early years.”<sup>88</sup> Without the program funding accessed by the scores of proposals produced by this department, GDI would not have been able to offer the programming that it did.

For a time, a division called “Native Human Justice Services” was under the Research Department. The work of this division included services to Aboriginal inmates in prisons and correctional facilities. The 1987 GDI Annual Report reports “Native Liaison and Elder services at the Saskatchewan Penitentiary were enhanced when Elder Dennis Thorne was able to devote his full time to the needs of inmates in the Saskatchewan penitentiary ... Both the liaison and Elder programs have filled a deep seated need within the Aboriginal population.”<sup>89</sup> The 1988 GDI Annual Report mentions that literacy tutoring was ongoing in the Prince Albert, Regina, and Saskatoon correctional centres.<sup>90</sup> The interest in justice services really took off in 1989 when GDI incorporated the Community Training Residence (CTR). In 1990, the Institute began building the CTR facility. The facility was completed in February 1991, and residents and staff took occupancy at that time. CTR’s official opening was in August 1991. After months of negotiations, “the Saskatchewan Department of Justice offered a five-year contract to the Gabriel Dumont Institute to operate the Community Training Residence. Official signing of the contract took place in Regina on May 28, 1991.”<sup>91</sup> The facility’s official opening took place on

August 19, 1991. Full information about the CTR is provided in another chapter of this book.

By 1992, the GDI Annual Report no longer refers to the Native Human Justice Services division of the Research Department. By 1993, the Institute underwent a restructuring that saw the Research Department amalgamate with other departments and come directly under GDI core services. In 1994, the Institute faced a financial crisis, outlined in another chapter of this book, and the Research Department essentially ceased to exist as a separate entity within the organization. This does not mean the Institute stopped doing research, however. As GDI Executive Director Geordy McCaffrey notes, “It’s likely not a case that we quit doing research, it’s likely more of a case where research became an inherent part of all duties and functions of the Institute.” Fortunately, the Research Department’s early leaders had encouraged all Institute staff to conduct relevant primary historical research about Métis and Non-Status Indians, leaving GDI in a position where many research activities

were continued by various managers, staff, and departments. The Research Department’s early efforts meant that GDI staff would have both the skills

*“... research became an inherent part of all duties and functions of the Institute.”*

*~Geordy McCaffrey*

necessary to conduct research and have access to key primary research that the department had conducted. These factors helped ease the Institute’s adjustment during the mid-1990s restructuring.

Today, there are many examples of active research being conducted in the Institute. DTI and GDIT&E conduct research and create community connections through their needs assessment and planning activities. The Publishing Department has ongoing research activities, many of which are outlined in another chapter of this book. SUNTEP provides research on its programming. In addition, GDI created the *Gabriel Dumont College Graduate Student Bursary Program* to increase the broad research base and talent within the Métis community.



## 9 Community Training Residence

GDI's CTR was established in 1989 after the Institute contracted with Saskatchewan Justice to establish a community-based training facility for incarcerated women. The GDI CTR agreement was the first time that community training residence services were contracted by Saskatchewan Justice to a non-government agency. GDI's CTR program was the province's first open custody, low security community training residence for women. In the late 1980s-early 1990s, Aboriginal women were shockingly over-represented in the prison population, at about 98%. Saskatchewan Justice understood the need to provide community programming to address the circumstances and needs of incarcerated Aboriginal women. GDI wanted to bid on the CTR contract because it wanted the facility run by an Aboriginal organization. When Saskatchewan Justice made the call for proposals for the community training residence for female offenders in June of 1988, there were three organizations that submitted proposals for the contract: the Salvation Army, the Elizabeth Fry Society, and GDI.<sup>92</sup> In May 1989 GDI was awarded the contract.

Initially, GDI searched for an existing facility in Saskatoon, but nothing suitable could be found so the decision was made to build a new permanent residence. *In the late 1980s-early 1990s, Aboriginal women were shockingly over-represented in the prison population, at about 98%.* In November 1989, the CTR began operating from a temporary facility in Saskatoon's Nutana Park area while plans for a new facility were being developed. The decision to build a facility prompted the renegotiation of the original contract with Saskatchewan Justice. The contract became longer and more comprehensive, and a new five-year agreement was signed in May 1991.<sup>93</sup>

The Saskatoon City Planning Department suggested a property adjacent to the Sri Lankan Temple in River Heights as a potential site for the new facility.<sup>94</sup> The Institute moved ahead and negotiated for the purchase of the land; however, neighbourhood resistance held up construction of the 14-bed facility in Saskatoon's north-end as some residents of the Lawson Heights and River Heights areas "opposed the location and pressured [Saskatoon] City Council to amend the zoning regulation in an effort to prohibit construction of the new CTR."<sup>95</sup> During March and April 1990, numerous articles appeared in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* about community resistance to the facility. The Sitter School of Dance, located three vacant lots from the CTR site, was a particularly vocal opponent, starting a

petition and citing concerns for the safety of children who attended the dance school.<sup>96</sup> In addition, Saskatoon city councilor Pat Robertson “vehemently opposed” the CTR as did a group calling itself the Concerned Citizens of River Heights who brought its concerns to city council meetings

*The local community association took a more objective view and many individuals came forward to speak in support of the facility and against the hysteria and ignorance that was driving the opposition.*

and to a large public forum. A representative of the Concerned Citizens of River Heights, Kathy Yaeger, was quoted as saying, “Common sense dictates the facility doesn’t belong where children congregate,”<sup>97</sup> making reference to the nearby dance school. In support of her

arguments, Yaeger also submitted to city council what was referred to as a “detailed and factual information package” that included newspaper clippings with inflammatory headlines such as “Fiendish Killer Freed and Does it Again.”<sup>98</sup> While the public arguments against the CTR were couched in terms of safety and property value concerns, LaFournaise points out that “covert reasons such as ‘Natives in their neighbourhood’ may certainly have been a factor.”<sup>99</sup>

On the other hand, some local groups were supportive of the CTR facility. The local community association took a more objective view and many individuals came forward to speak in support of the facility and against the hysteria and ignorance that was driving the opposition.<sup>100</sup> In addition, the Meewasin Valley United Church and the Peace Mennonite Church both “steadfastly supported” the CTR.<sup>101</sup>



CTR Building, Mid-1990s. GDI Archives

Eventually the issues were resolved as the zoning regulations were upheld, and on September 13, 1990, GDI received the building permit to start construction. The next day, residents and staff of the CTR held a “ceremonial sod-turning event ending the celebration with the burning of sacred Sweetgrass and a prayer of thanks to the Great Spirit.”<sup>102</sup> The newly-built CTR opened its doors on February 1, 1991. The facility’s official grand opening was held on August 19, 1991. Over time, the CTR gained public acceptance when it became obvious that the fully operational facility would create no issues. As the 1992 CTR Annual Report points out, “Community acceptance was inevitable with the recognition that the fully supervised facility would not pose a threat or lower the property value of the concerned residents.”<sup>103</sup> The facility was intentionally operated in a very low profile manner in the community, with no signage and with its front entrance facing away from the dance studio that had put up such opposition. The CTR blended into the community and many area residents became either oblivious to its existence or became actively involved with programming and support of the facility.<sup>104</sup>

Originally, the CTR was established as a separately-incorporated company that operated as part of GDI’s holdings. Early documents list a separate board for the CTR. For instance, the 1992 CTR Annual Report indicates a Board of Directors, with Christopher Lafontaine, GDI Executive Director (1985-1991), listed as Chairperson, and 9 Board members as follows: Jim Favel, Napoleon Gardiner, Norman Hansen, May Henderson, Ralph Kennedy, Max Morin, Linda Peterson, Shirley Ross, and Noble Shanks. The CTR Board of Directors included some members of the GDI Board, but not all of them—at the time the GDI Board had a



*CTR Resident, Mid-1990s. GDI Archives*

total of 23 members. Long-time GDI employee Lorraine Amiotte recalls that it was fairly common practice to have a secondary board oversee one of the Institute's holdings. The CTR had a separate Board of Directors, but the main GDI Board was always in control. As the 1992 CTR Annual Report notes, "The CTR is responsible to Gabriel Dumont Institute board of Directors."<sup>105</sup> Other segments of the Institute had similarly-structured board oversight, such as GDC, which had a separate board, and SUNTEP, which operated with a separate review committee.

The CTR residence, located at 123 LaRonge Road, was designed to encourage a family atmosphere. In a September 1991 *New Breed* article, the building is described as having a number of special features, "including a suite where women can have their children sleep with them during overnight visits. The home features a teaching kitchen and a large functional veranda. A circular room in the heart of the residence 'has been adopted

*The purpose of the facility was to provide a structured residential setting with full support for women transitioning from jail to the community.*

as a place where women can go for some quiet reflection."<sup>106</sup>

The Institute developed a treatment program that included education and training in a comprehensive support environment. While the initial focus was squarely on education and employment, it soon became apparent that "treatment for alcohol and drug addiction and

counselling for mental and emotional dysfunctions" needed to be addressed before focusing on education and employment.<sup>107</sup> Programming subsequently included substance abuse treatment, counselling, life skills, tutoring, pre-employment counselling, and cultural enrichment for women serving sentences under provincial jurisdiction. The purpose of the facility was to provide a structured residential setting with full support for women transitioning from jail to the community.

Most of the residents at the facility transferred unsupervised by STC bus to the CTR from the Pine Grove Correctional Centre in Prince Albert. Sentenced women were allowed to stay for a maximum of six months. "In 1991-92 the average length of stay was fifty-six days."<sup>108</sup>

Through its philosophy of providing unique programs that promoted self-determination and justice for Aboriginal people, GDI stressed the need for education for the clients in order to gain the CTR contract. The objective was to "really make a difference," as opposed to "providing better sameness."<sup>109</sup> A significant influence behind this desire to take on the CTR programming was the understanding that the facility should be run by an Aboriginal organization. In bidding for the project, the Institute had the

best of intentions and motivations.

Over the course of the contract with Saskatchewan Justice, the CTR was chronically underfunded. In 1994, when the Institute faced a financial crisis and was given a conditional grant by the province, the CTR operation was given up as part of the agreement. In the agreement, the reasons for GDI wanting to be involved with the CTR were lauded, including the fact that the Institute had an interest in making sure the CTR was run by an Aboriginal organization. However, it was noted that the CTR was far outside of the Institute's educational mandate, and that it had, year-after-year, operated at a deficit, which contributed to GDI's financial woes.

A March 14, 1996 Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* article by Donella Hoffman indicates that GDI decided not to renew its contract when the current five-year contract expired on March 31, 1996. Robert Devrome, then acting Executive Director, is quoted in the article: "Running the half way house, or Community Training Residence (CTR), required extra attention by the board and management, when their mandate was education."<sup>110</sup> Similarly, Murray Hamilton notes that the CTR was a "white elephant." He says he never understood what was going on with the purchase and building of the CTR. "I don't know what the motives were."

After the contract expired, the Institute made overtures to sell the building, but the early 1990s were marked by a recession in Saskatchewan, and GDI and was unable to attract a buyer. From 1996 forward, the CTR continued to operate on GDI's books as an incorporated entity under lease from Saskatchewan Justice. Funding from the lease agreement consistently fell short of expenses on a building that required regular maintenance and repairs. From time-to-time, meetings would occur between GDI and Saskatchewan Justice to try and resolve the lease issue, which was at a very favourable rate for Saskatchewan Justice. In 2006, Saskatchewan Justice chose to exercise an option under the 1991 long-term lease agreement to renew the lease for an additional 10-year period. This tied the Institute to a low-paying lease and higher than expected maintenance expenses. Despite efforts to renegotiate or break the lease, Saskatchewan Justice held the Institute to the agreement, which will not expire until 2016.

In 2009, GDI developed a plan to remove the CTR from the register of the provincial Corporations Branch. CTR's assets and obligations were legally transferred to GDI and the CTR corporation was wound down. This move at least served to save the Institute the annual costs of an audit associated with a separately-incorporated entity. The CTR building is now listed as a GDI property asset, along with a number of other properties that form a growing asset base.



## 10 Technical Programs

Today, DTI, part of the GDI family, delivers technical or skills training programs as well as adult upgrading via a community-based model across Saskatchewan. From GDI's earliest agreement, the notion of such a community-based adult education system was included. In the Institute's first contract, a "potential" future area of work for GDI was identified as a "Community Education Department." The role of this potential department was undetermined at the time, but it was to be the topic of on-going negotiations with the Department of Continuing Education. The inclusion of this particular clause in the original GDI contract reflects a desire by the Métis and Non-Status Indian communities to have community-based adult education opportunities much like the role that DTI plays today. It would take a full 12 years from the signing of this first GDI agreement to evolve the DTI model of community-based skills training that exists today.

When GDI was established, there was a great deal of discussion and dissatisfaction with the NRIM program, which was the main funding source for Métis and Non-Status Indian people looking for adult upgrading and technical/skills training in community college programs. At the time, NRIM also provided funding for Métis and Non-Status Indians to attend university programs. It was felt that the program, which provided living allowances, did not meet the needs of the people it was supposed to serve. An article in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* on September 20, 1980 reports, "One of the topics discussed at a series of workshops Friday [at the first annual GDI cultural conference] concerned the sort of role the institute should play, if any, in meeting the educational needs of native adults through the non-registered Indian and Métis education program."<sup>111</sup> The article goes on to say, "The provincially-funded program, which provides natives with a daily living allowance for taking upgrading and other courses at Saskatchewan's community colleges, has been criticized frequently for not meeting the needs of native adults." The provincial Education Minister, Doug McArthur "declined to comment ... He noted the program is under review."<sup>112</sup> Areas of concern raised by AMNSIS about the NRIM program included the decision-making processes for the NRIM funds and what kind of input Métis and Non-Status people had in the selection and delivery of training programs. The 1980 review of the program was sparked by these AMNSIS concerns.

Roger Butterfield, former MSS/AMNSIS Director of Education, notes that in the early days of Métis adult upgrading (in the late 1960s), the MSS planned programs in conjunction with the provincial government. There

were education committees in each community, which sent their upgrading needs in, and the MSS Director of Education would then work with the province to try and organize the programming. There was a great deal of push and pull in the negotiations and Roger Butterfield recalls “tough arguments with bureaucrats about the approach that should be taken.”

The effects of those early offerings of adult upgrading in Aboriginal communities were unexpected and can be linked to the drive to establish GDI. Roger Butterfield notes, “We thought that people would take their grade ten and then go on to post-secondary [job-specific] training. Nobody anticipated the ground swell when the doors to adult education opened—no one expected that people would participate as much in it ... but some wanted to go beyond that to the academic training. And so we organized some grade



*Roger Butterfield,  
New Breed Magazine, November 1974, 17.*

11 and 12, with the GED exams, and then they qualified for university training.” It was out of this unexpected impetus from community people for higher education that the push to create GDI arose.

While discussions regarding the Institute’s community education role continued during its first years of existence, there was again deep resistance and even hostility to the idea of GDI directly delivering programs. For those in the community college system, they did not see how GDI was different from a community college, and they did not understand the

*“Nobody anticipated the ground swell when the doors to adult education opened—no one expected that people would participate as much in it...”*

*~Roger Butterfield*

fundamentally important foundation that the cultural mandate provided. The community colleges also had a certain amount of territorial anxiety.

The role of GDI in community-based education continued to be the topic of discussion through the spring of 1982. At that point, some progress had been made towards

developing a model for Métis participation in the vocational/technical education system. “That model however, did not include a direct role for the Institute in delivering training programs at the community level. It





*GDI Graduate, Mid-1980s. GDI Archives*

communities as representing them or speaking on their education training needs.”<sup>114</sup>

In the spring of 1982, a new provincial government was elected with a “different philosophy about allowing Aboriginal people control over their own education.”<sup>115</sup> The Native Advisory Committees found themselves shut out of the NSIM decisions and “the fund was set aside for utilization by the community colleges for instructional costs and training allowance for Métis and Non-Status Indians taking upgrading classes in the community college system.”<sup>116</sup>

In the mid-1980s, GDI accessed federal funds under the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC). “Traditionally, the federal government had delivered funding for pre-vocational and for vocational/technical training through the provincial education system by cost sharing provincial programming”<sup>117</sup> but in the mid-1980s the federal government changed its practice. The federal government “would no longer cost share provincial programs but instead it would purchase training from any public or private institution which could deliver quality training to prepare workers for jobs which were in demand in the labour market. At the same time, adult upgrading became ineligible for federal funds because this was seen as a provincial responsibility.”<sup>118</sup>

provided for the establishment of a Native Advisory Committee in each community college region which would participate with the colleges and the Department of Continuing Education in doing needs assessment, identifying needed training programs and in the recruitment, selection and support of Métis students who were in training.”<sup>113</sup> It was further agreed that decisions about how NSIM funding would be used to support individual students and broad educational programs would include input from the Native Advisory Committee as well; however, “these committees ... [were] not seen by Métis political organizations and some

In response, GDI developed a comprehensive training proposal for the Saskatchewan Training Employment Program (STEP), which it submitted to CEIC. The program received three-year funding to deliver vocational and technical training programs in various communities throughout the province.



*GDI Graduates, Mid-1980s. GDI Archives*

“This to some degree satisfied the desire of Métis people to have more control over and to be able to deliver training to their people through community based training programs.”<sup>119</sup>

The 1985 GDI Annual Report notes that the STEP program’s purpose was to deliver technical training programs to adults in those centres where the Institute had satellite programming, and to look for areas to develop new programming. Delivery of the community-based programs occurred in cooperation with various post-secondary institutions throughout the province, and students in the programs would receive recognized credentials upon the completion of their training. Other program objectives were in line with GDI’s mission and mandate and centred on the Institute’s cultural mandate and support aspects.<sup>120</sup>

The STEP program was based on a grassroots philosophy and relied on the communities for labour needs assessment, priorities, and program development.<sup>121</sup> Some of the programs offered under the STEP initiative included Business Administration, Early Childhood Development, Agricultural Mechanics, Radio / TV Electronics, and Native Social Work. In 1988, GDI produced a promotional document called *Portraits of Progress: Students of the Gabriel Dumont Institute*. The document highlights students involved in the STEP program’s technical and vocational training: “The aim of



*GDI Graduates, Late 1980s. GDI Archives*



*GDI Step Programming,  
Late 1980s 1. GDI Archives*

the technical program is to ensure that as many Métis and Non-Status Indians as possible qualify for these occupations ... . The technical programs are accredited by the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology.”<sup>122</sup> Again, the grassroots involvement in adult education reflected the overarching aim of self-government development. As Richard Thatcher notes in a 1985 report, “While part of the preparation for self-government takes place in the classroom, an equally vital part is centred in the experience of participation in the design, administration and delivery

of educational programming itself.”<sup>123</sup>

The STEP program can be very much seen as DTT’s initial model. The Institute needed to find a way to sustain the momentum for the community program delivery beyond federal funding. In the 1985 GDI Annual Report, there are a number of references to exploring all possible funding sources to support the continuance of the GDI delivery system for occupational training.<sup>124</sup>

The initial STEP program was implemented in 1985, and was followed up with subsequent agreements until 1991. In 1991, the federal government introduced a new training strategy for Aboriginal people known as “Pathways to Success.” Under the new federal training strategy, the purchase of training was devolved to the communities. A complex structure of local and regional management boards was developed to make decisions about training delivery to Métis people in communities. Pathways funding was directed



*Radio / TV Electronics Program,  
Esterhazy, Mid-1980s. GDI Archives*

to Métis people in communities. Pathways funding was directed

to the Pathways boards, which essentially made arrangements to purchase training from regional colleges, the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), and private firms, leaving GDI out of the process. Until that time, GDI had the STEP contract with CEIC to deliver about \$2 million per year in technical and vocational programming. With the advent of Pathways, this contract came to an end as the federal government made the full-fledged move to the new strategy.

The mid-to-late 1980s was a time of change in Saskatchewan on the skills/vocational training front.

In the mid 1980s, the province undertook a review of the community college system which also included the four technical institutes operated by the province. Following the review, a decision was made to amalgamate the four technical institutes under one organization called the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology with four campus locations. Where there was a community college located in the same centre as a SIAST campus, the college function was taken over by SIAST. The remaining 9 community colleges became known as Regional Colleges and their mandate stayed the same as before the reorganization.<sup>125</sup>

In addition, there was increased focus on providing Aboriginal people with the opportunity to have direct input into decision-making processes



*GDI Step Programming,  
Late 1980s 2. GDI Archives*



*GDI Step Programming,  
Late 1980s 3. GDI Archives*

within SIAST. As such, the province proposed that GDI's Executive Director become one of the vice-presidents of SIAST. "Also recognizing that there were only a few Aboriginal students in SIAST programs, the province proposed the establishment of a counseling support unit to be known as the Native Services Division of GDI. An initial contract was entered into by the Department of Education and GDI in 1987 to establish this new program unit within GDI. This staff unit included two management staff located on one of the Regina campuses of SIAST, plus one counselor located on each SIAST campus (Regina, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert)."<sup>126</sup>

As a result, the Native Services Division (NSD) was established in 1988 as part of the access to education initiative designed to increase Aboriginal access to training opportunities. NSD is DTI's precursor. The 1988 GDI Annual Report states "the objectives of the Native Services Division are:

- To ensure that the Aboriginal communities of Saskatchewan are equitably represented at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology;
- To train and graduate students of Aboriginal ancestry as fully certified graduates of applied science and technology programs; to strengthen and enhance Aboriginal culture, identity and community awareness."<sup>127</sup>

The NSD provided counsellors, referral services, writing clinics, tutorials, and orientation to Aboriginal students at SIAST's four campuses. "Native people have been much underrepresented both as students and



*GDI Student Graduation, Late 1980s. GDI Archives*

staff in the campuses that now make up SIAST and ... systemic discrimination and other barriers to Native equity remain."<sup>128</sup>

Upon NSD's creation, it became integrated with STEP. This allowed the Institute to better identify specific training needs, and to more effectively and consistently administer its programs. In 1988, GDI offered accredited training programs in a variety of Métis communities in Saskatchewan, including Business Administration in Fort Qu'Appelle, Early Childhood Development in Saskatoon, and Radio/TV Electronics in Esterhazy. These

programs were brokered through SIAST campuses in much the same way that DTI brokers programs today under the terms of its Federation Agreement with SIAST. However, at the time, no such formal agreement was in place between GDI and SIAST. Programs were designed to meet local or regional labour market needs and to provide for practical work experience. There was also a focus on upgrading skills; for instance, grade 12 math and sciences were offered in 1987 with the opportunity for students to challenge departmental exams.

In the 1987 GDI Annual Report, both the Chairperson's report and the Executive Director's report make mention of negotiations with SIAST for a federation agreement.<sup>129</sup> In reality, this agreement, as we know it today, would not be signed until 1992. Instead, negotiations led to an agreement with SIAST to provide expanded services including more course offerings and liaison support services to Métis students on SIAST campuses.

In 1990, a committee prepared a review of SIAST and addressed for the first time the specific issue of vocational/technical training of Métis people by a Métis-owned and controlled institution. "It recommended that the Minister give immediate consideration to establishing a process by which GDI, the government and SIAST could collaborate on establishing such an institution and provide for some formal relationship between the institution and SIAST."<sup>130</sup> The Minister struck a committee made up of government bureaucrats, SIAST, and GDI representatives with the mandate to "examine the implication of SIAST/DTI federation and recommend a suggested framework for the creation of Dumont Technical Institute."<sup>131</sup> The committee reported to the Minister on September 1991 recommending that DTI be incorporated, that the department enter into an agreement with DTI that would spell out its mandate and initiate federation with SIAST, and that DTI and SIAST negotiate a federation agreement. In 1992, an agreement in principle was signed between GDI and Saskatchewan Education for DTI's establishment.<sup>132</sup>

*In 1992, an agreement in principle was signed between GDI and Saskatchewan Education for DTI's establishment.*

At the same time that the federal Pathways strategy was being introduced, DTI was being developed. DTI was officially incorporated on October 11, 1991, but operations did not begin until November 1, 1992. Between November 1992 and August 1994, DTI organized

itself, developed business plans, negotiated services and affiliation with SIAST, developed its curriculum, and recruited and admitted students. DTI's first students began classes in September 1994.

In 1994, GDI faced a financial crisis that is outlined in detail in another

chapter of this book. The crisis, which prompted a conditional grant agreement with the provincial government, sparked a funding change for DTI. Until the conditional grant agreement was signed, DTI had not been provided with Saskatchewan Skills Extension Program (SSEP) funds as part of its annual funding allocation from the province. All the regional colleges received such funds to help deliver skills and vocational-type training in their respective regions. Part of the province's solution to the Institute's financial troubles and to the federal government's withdrawal from funding the STEP program was to provide DTI with SSEP funds as "seed" money, much like the regional colleges, so that DTI would be able to lever funds from the Pathways boards. In essence, this allowed the Institute to compete for contracts to provide training programs to their own communities that were served by the regional colleges and SIAST. This was good news for DTI, and it helped to bring the Institute some form of parity with other similar educational institutions in the province.

Basic Education training for Métis people was a slower process to devolve from the regional colleges and SIAST. At first, DTI would make decisions about seat allocations within the college and SIAST systems. GDI's current Executive Director, Geordy McCaffrey, was the Principal of DTI during part of this period. He recalls what the status quo process was like: "DTI would meet with each regional college and go over their allocations that were based on an NSIM formula, and we would come to agreement on the allocations." This process favoured the colleges because it allowed them to retain control of the funding for Basic Education and maintain their instructional staff. Then DTI started to request its own funds to deliver Adult Basic Education training programs, including ABE 10 and GED preparation and testing. This was a contentious issue because funds that had previously gone to the college system and SIAST for ABE delivery to Métis people were to be gradually devolved to DTI for direct delivery. The Department of Continuing Education came under fire from the colleges and SIAST for pulling the money out—there was concern over job losses in the college and SIAST systems, and there were potential union issues. A "Transition Plan" had been put in place in 1994 between DTI, SIAST, and the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees Union, which represents GDI and SIAST's unionized employees, anticipating staffing issues. The transition agreement recognized that SIAST stood to lose control of almost \$700,000 in Métis Basic Education delivery funding as the funding devolved to DTI. The transition plan reflected the concern and called for the secondment of affected SIAST staff to DTI. Over the long term, this became a moot point and Geordy McCaffrey indicates he cannot recall anyone being seconded under the terms of that agreement.

Over the next few years, DTI took full control of its ABE delivery. Under the terms of the agreement with the province, DTI had the authority to grant credit for ABE programs. In about 2000, DTI became involved in the delivery of Adult 12 through the use of its Basic Education funding and in cooperation with the K-12 Ministry of Education.

In addition, the Provincial Training Allowance (PTA) replaced the NSIM program in 1998. The PTA was a needs-based funding program available to any student enrolled in ABE-type programming. Each institution delivering ABE-type programming received training in order to process and administer the PTA. The PTA effectively put an end to the long-held and intense dissatisfaction with the NSIM program.

As DTI matured and evolved as an institution, it was inevitable that more scrutiny would be applied to its position among other similar institutions in the province, namely the regional colleges. Over time, DTI took on increasing reporting and accountability roles, ultimately producing comprehensive annual business plans and operational forecasts in the same manner as the regional colleges. In 2007, DTI Director, Brett Vandale, identified an issue in relation to its core operational funding. In a comparison of program and operational funding of the regional colleges and DTI, it became apparent that the Institute was operating at a significant disadvantage to similar institutions in the province. Where other institutions were receiving as much as \$1.93 per training dollar in operating grants, DTI was receiving only 30 cents.<sup>133</sup> In essence, the Institute's core operations were underfunded by as much as 84% when compared to other similar institutions. And yet, DTI was expected to follow the same rigorous accountability and reporting procedures as the regional colleges. In fact, in comparison to all the regional colleges in the province, DTI ranked last in its operating funding from the province. DTI was expected to do the same level of work that other colleges were doing but on a fraction of the budget.

In addition, DTI found that it ranked fourth in terms of number of students in relation to the regional colleges. This meant that DTI was servicing more students with fewer operating funds than about half of the other colleges that dealt with fewer students on an annual basis. In addition, while regional colleges operate within a distinct geographical area, DTI is responsible to provide training programs throughout the province to all 12 MNS regions. As Brett Vandale pointed out in DTI's Operations Forecast, the implication for DTI was that this pressure would soon outweigh its resources.<sup>134</sup>

Administrators brought this inequity to the attention of government with little effect. In four consecutive business plans, DTI addressed the discrepancy as an unresolved issue. As noted in the 2009-2010 Operations



Forecast, “One key area that remains unresolved ... is challenges around equitable funding. DTI remains significantly under funded in its core operational grant.”<sup>135</sup> At that point, the amount of the DTI core operations grant had increased slightly, from 30 to 43 cents per training dollar, and by 2010 the amount had increased to about 70 cents per training dollar.<sup>136</sup> At the same time, the amounts granted to the colleges had also increased and some were receiving as much as \$2.08—still more than a 65% deficit at the highest end.<sup>137</sup> With no clear resolution in sight, DTI continues to rank last in its operating funds from the province.

DTI was always a dream of the Métis community in Saskatchewan, and the need for it was indicated as far back as the Institute’s founding in 1980. Over the 12 years between GDI’s establishment and DTI’s founding, the vision for community-based delivery of technical training programs remained strong on the agenda. For example, at the 1988 GDI cultural conference a five-year plan was proposed that included the continued development of an Aboriginal-controlled technical institute with federated college status with one or both of the universities.<sup>138</sup>

DTI has had six Principals or Acting Principals over its 18-year history. The first principal of DTI was Anne Dorion, who was DTI Principal from 1993 to 1995. From 1995-1996, Perry Chaboyer was DTI’s Acting Principal. Perry would leave DTI to become CEO of Métis Employment and Training of Saskatchewan Inc (METSII). Peter McKay filled the role as Principal for DTI from 1996-1997, followed by Geordy McCaffrey, whose term as Principal lasted for six years from 1997 to 2003. Geordy moved on from his role as DTI Principal to become GDI’s Executive Director. During Geordy’s term as DTI Principal, Lisa Wilson filled the role of Acting Principal from 1998-1999 while Geordy took an education leave to complete his Masters in Business Administration degree. Finally, Brett Vandale became the DTI’s Director in 2003, a position he continues to hold. Brett is the longest standing Principal/Director in DTI’s history. The DTI Director/Principal reports to the GDI Executive Director.

The following is a list of DTI Principals and Acting Principals since the Institute’s inception:

1993-1995: Anne Dorion

1995-1996: Perry Chaboyer (A/Principal)

1996-1997: Peter MacKay

1997-2003: Geordy McCaffrey

1998-1999: Lisa Wilson (A/Principal)

2003-Present: Brett Vandale (Director)

Today DTI is a well-established, thriving institution functioning as GDI's basic education and skills training program. DTI's stated goal in the 2009-2010 GDI Annual Report is "to provide quality education, training opportunities, and services to Saskatchewan's Métis."<sup>139</sup> The original objectives of the new Institute, from the 1992 GDI Annual Report, included "ensuring the Métis community is equitably represented in skills-training programs, to train and graduate Métis students, and to strengthen Métis culture and identity,"<sup>140</sup>

are objectives that remain at the core of both GDI and DTI's identity. Over the past 18 years, DTI has been successful in offering basic education and skills training programs to Métis across the province while being instrumental in helping reshape Métis lives and communities.

DTI has grown over the years. According to the 1996 GDI Annual Report, DTI had a total student enrollment of 71

in skills-training programs. Another 200 Métis students received Adult Basic Education through agreements with the regional colleges and SIAST. Twelve students received GED preparation and testing through DTI's direct delivery system.<sup>141</sup> These numbers can be contrasted with the 2009-2010 program year during which DTI had an enrolment of 294 students in the skills-training programs and an enrolment of 315 students in the Adult Basic Education Programs.

DTI's community-based delivery philosophy remains one of its most important features. Community-based delivery improves access and ensures Métis students have opportunities close to home. It is recognized that community-based delivery, coupled with the Institute's cultural focus, helps attract Métis students who may not otherwise participate in post-secondary programs.



*Brett Vandale, Tracy Arcand, and Glenn Lafleur,  
November 2010. Peter Beszterda, GDI Archives*

## 11 Employment Services

Throughout GDI's history, the Institute has received federal funds linked to labour force development. GDI's initial involvement in federal labour market programs is outlined in the preceding chapter on Technical Programs and included STEP, a program developed to deliver vocational and technical training to Métis and Non-Status communities throughout the province. Much like today's employment and training programs, the Institute's early programs relied on local and regional needs assessment and labour market information to determine suitable programming.

GDI's ability to access federal funds for training programs was a result of a shift in government practice in the mid-1980s. The federal government moved away from a cost-sharing arrangement with the provincial government to a situation where they would contract with institutions that could deliver training linked to labour market demand. This opened the door for GDI to become involved in federal labour market programming.

GDI successfully operated the STEP program for a number of years, delivering a number of training programs such as Early Childhood Development and Native Social Work in various locations across the province. CEIC had a policy by which they would not fund training leading to a university degree, but they would fund university level programming leading to a certificate or diploma. Under these regulations, GDI was able to deliver several certificate and diploma programs in partnership with the University of Regina. The most comprehensive of these programs were the Native Management Studies Program and the Human Justice Program.<sup>142</sup> In 1991, the federal government introduced a new training strategy for Aboriginal people known as Pathways to Success. The federal Pathways strategy changed the structure of employment and training programs for Aboriginal people.

The aim of the Pathways strategy was to develop a trained Aboriginal workforce via a devolved process that saw the establishment of national and regional Aboriginal management boards to set the training priorities for Aboriginal communities. The result for GDI was that federal money that had previously flowed to the Institute was now being administered by a separate agency.

Under the Pathways initiative, a whole new service delivery agency emerged in Saskatchewan. Regional and Local Aboriginal Management Boards (RAMBs and LAMBs) were established under Pathways. Under the new initiative, regional administration was established whereby each MSS region managed its own funds. This complemented the early vision

of Métis leaders who always contemplated regional grassroots boards delivering services to their community.

The federal Pathways strategy would later be replaced by Regional Bilateral Agreements (RBAs), which were then replaced by the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement (AHRDA). Most recently, the AHRDA was replaced by the Aboriginal Skills, Employment and Training Strategy (ASETS). While the names of the federal programs have changed over time, the essence of the strategy has remained the provision of labour market programming for Aboriginal people administered by Aboriginal organizations.

Ultimately, METSI was established to administer the federal employment and training agreement for Saskatchewan Métis. The Métis political regions operated with Local Métis Management Boards (LMMBs) and a central, board-governed system. In all, there were over 100 people involved in the governing process.<sup>143</sup> One of the results of this was constant conflict between local boards and the central office. In addition, administrative expenses to operate such a large governance structure were extremely high which had the effect of taking much-needed training funds out of the hands of students.

METSI, as an organization, was plagued with problems. Between 1992 and 2001, each of the regions received the same amount of funding—the federal funding provided to the central METSI office for Saskatchewan Métis employment and training services was simply divided into 12 equal shares to be administered by each of the Métis political regions. This process failed to account for differences in Métis population size between regions so that regions with a few hundred Métis received the same funding resources as those with several thousand, leaving urban centres and larger regions at an extreme disadvantage.

*This process failed to account for differences in Métis population size between regions ...*

METSI's central office had 11 different CEOs in its 14-year history. This lack of stability and continuity sent a bad message to potential partners and highlights the organization's ill health.<sup>144</sup> In the late 1990s, DTI was left with hundreds of thousands of dollars in unpaid receivables under contracts with several of the LMMBs, much of which was eventually written off as bad debt. As a result of this experience, the Institute moved to a cash-in-hand policy.

In 2000, METSI had its agreement pulled by the federal government and a forensic audit identified over \$1 million as overpayments. Incidents of fraud were revealed. In 2001, METSI and its central administration

were restructured in order to regain federal funding. In 2003-2004, the Saskatoon Métis Employment and Training office ran into problems with university students being admitted to the program and being sponsored for four years, a practice ineligible under the funding regulations. This time, a third party, Deloitte & Touche, was involved and Service Canada took on oversight of all activities. Sponsorship for university training was removed and then reinstated in a very limited way one year later.<sup>145</sup>



*Carol Skelton, MP, Saskatoon-Rosetown-Biggar, GDI Training and Employment Signing, January 2007. GDI Archives*

Finally, in 2005 when the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS) was renewed nationally by the federal government for four years, METSI was given a one-year extension in a last-ditch effort for the organization to redeem itself, but in 2006 the federal government declined to renew the Métis Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement with METSI and the organization was subsequently wound down.

*In late 2006, GDI was successful in its bid and the Institute took over the AHRDA contract.*

The Canada-Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services agency in Saskatchewan took over interim administration of Métis programming where METSI had left off. In an effort to find the right organization to provide employment and training services to the Métis people of Saskatchewan, the federal government put out a call for proposals for organizations interested in administering these services to Métis communities. GDI hesitated to make application for the project, but after learning that non-Aboriginal groups were bidding for the contract, the GDI Board of Governors made the decision to move forward with a proposal.

In late 2006, GDI was successful in its bid and the Institute took over the AHRDA contract. The new federal contract effectively doubled the size



*Tavia Laliberte, Carol Skelton, and Doyle Vermette,  
GDI Training and Employment Signing,  
January 2007. GDI Archives*

of the Institute. Many of the problematic practices of the former delivery agent were reformed as GDI moved to stabilize employment and training services for the Métis people. GDI Training & Employment was incorporated on December 4, 2006 to become the most recent entity added to GDI's varied programs and services. GDI Training & Employment's first Director, Tavia Laliberte, came from within the Institute's ranks where she

had been a DTI Program Coordinator for a number of years. She is the current GDIT&E Director, a position she has held since 2006. GDIT&E has also had one Acting Director, Cecile O'Neil, who moved into the acting position for one year while Tavia Laliberte was on leave.

GDI's Board of Governors oversees the Training & Employment entity in the same way as the Institute's other incorporated entities. It follows its current practice of policy development, strategic planning, and program and budget approval. GDIT&E operates within GDI's centralized administration with its central office in Saskatoon, but has 11 community-based offices plus outreach programming to provide services to Métis communities across the province. In addition, GDIT&E established three selection committees (northern, central, and southern) to make decisions on individual sponsorship for training programs. Each of the selection committees operates on a blind adjudication policy that removes problems of conflict of interest and confidentiality.

*Today, GDI Training & Employment provides Métis-specific career and employment services to approximately 1,300 clients each year.*

Today, GDI Training & Employment provides Métis-specific career and employment services to approximately 1,300 clients each year. Much of GDIT&E's services to clients include wage subsidies for employment experience and individual sponsorship for training programs. GDIT&E

has made a number of innovative moves in the last few years including a scholarship partnership program designed to encourage Saskatchewan employers to invest in Métis students who may fill future labour needs in their organizations, and a recent apprenticeship subsidy program aimed at increasing the number and scope of Métis apprentices in Saskatchewan. In 2010, GDIT&E signed a new five-year agreement with the federal government under ASETS, ensuring the future of career and employment services for Saskatchewan Métis.





## 12 Crisis 1994

Often the history of an organization or a movement is marked by a significant event or series of events. For GDI, the significant event in most people's minds that marks a particular and critical pivotal moment is the 1994 financial crisis. While examining this part of the Institute's history is ugly, it is absolutely necessary. In fact, to gloss over it would deny the Institute an honest accounting of a very trying period in its corporate history. GDI has built its reputation and public image over the years since its inception. Institute staff, faculty, and graduates have been noted for their professionalism and have been credited for building the Institute's positive reputation. When viewed as a whole, the Institute's story is an extremely positive one. The crisis of 1994 was the culmination of a number of factors that ultimately led to a turning point in GDI's history. GDI's long-term viability would come to turn on this particular moment in its history.

Well before the crisis really became full blown in the fall of 1994, Institute staff understood that there was a problem. As much as a year before the full-scale crisis, paycheques issued to Institute staff would periodically bounce. At the time, there was no direct deposit; manual cheques were issued each payday from the Accounting office in Regina. Skip Kutz, a long time SUNTEP faculty member, recalls, rather tongue-in-cheek, that it got to the point where staff would engage in a "footrace" to the credit union on campus to cash their paycheques. "The last one there wouldn't get any money," he said, laughing. All joking aside, he recalls that this was the first and most obvious indication to the staff that there was a serious financial problem brewing at GDI. Murray Hamilton, SUNTEP Saskatoon Coordinator, similarly recalls picking up the cheques for his department and going to the bank first to cash his to ensure that he got paid. Mike Relland, Prince Albert SUNTEP Coordinator, also recalls the "sprint to the bank" with the paycheque.

Murray Hamilton goes back even further, discussing the 1980s and recalling that Institute staff could see that the Board was a problem. It was too big, costly, politicized, and not all members fully understood the value of education. The costs to run the large board were over a quarter of a million dollars a year. Pat Atkinson, who was the Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment (SETE) Minister from 1993-1995, notes that the GDI governance issue was not a secret: "Per diems and travel and

sustenance for a board— all of those things are expensive. Large boards create problems. GDI’s governance was on the radar for a while,” she says.

Murray Hamilton notes that the real problems started to surface in 1991-92 when not only were the board costs out of control, but



*Skip Kutz (left) and Murray Hamilton (right),  
Early 1990s. SUNTEP Saskatoon Collection*

there was widespread intimidation of staff. There was manipulation of staff, threats to staff, he recalls being threatened, and there was patronage. Communities that should not have had programs based on any objective assessment would see large-scale programs being run, simply based on who was a friend with whom. Murray Hamilton recalls seeing the Director of University Programs threatened by one of the board or community people, being told basically, “either you do as I say or you’re out.” The number of changes in the Executive Director position in those years is an indication of the Institute’s poor health at the time.

In addition, three sections within GDI were combined in 1993 to form the Core Services Division. Prior to this restructuring, GDI’s divisions had

*The number of changes in the Executive Director position in those years is an indication of the Institute’s poor health at the time.*

operated independently and with separate administrators. Efficiency dictated that the amount of administration be scaled back. As a result, three departments—Curriculum

Development, Research, and Library—were put together under GDI Core Services. It was following the 1994 layoffs that the Curriculum Department relocated to Saskatoon from Regina.

Then the newspaper articles began to surface. The articles were largely written by Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* reporter James Parker, whose defamatory headlines and “bad news” focus did little to endear him to the Métis people. In March 1994, Parker reported on a letter from John Dorion to the GDI Board Chair Phillip Chartier. Dorion, who was Director of Core Operations, questioned the legitimacy of certain fund transfers and fiscal management made by the Institute. Parker summarizes the situation, saying Dorion “is upset \$170,000 was taken from the Métis facility’s



Gerald Morin, Early 1991. GDI Archives

core budget and diverted into a new category called ‘executive.’”<sup>146</sup> Chartier, who was also the treasurer of the MNS executive at the time, was unavailable for comment regarding this particular news article. Dorion essentially became the whistleblower on the whole affair. Fallout included a review of the books by the province, which resulted in a brief suspension of GDI funding.

On April 29, 1994, the province suspended GDI’s funding because of the results of the MNS, SUNTEP, and GDI financial audits. According to a May 11, 1994 Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* article by Parker, “The audit revealed several instances in which Métis officials billed the institute and the MNS for the same expense.”<sup>147</sup> There were also several payments made by GDI to the MNS that could not be accounted for. The MNS was in a state of turmoil itself, and the MNS audit pointed to \$1 million in expenditures that could not be explained. Gerald Morin, who was at the time both MNS and MNC President, was facing fierce political opposition and increasing criticism for mismanagement of funds. By June 1994, the MNS audit had been turned over to the RCMP and Morin had agreed to a provincial government plan to have an accounting firm act as the MNS’ financial adviser.<sup>148</sup>

*By June 1994, the MNS audit had been turned over to the RCMP ...*

GDI’s funding was reinstated on May 12, 1994 so that the Institute could meet its payroll and avoid putting its 400 students in jeopardy. The funding suspension was lifted after the GDI Board agreed to a “comprehensive operational review” by the province.<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, the funds did not immediately begin to flow as needed and in mid-June 1994, Bob Armstrong, Director of Finance, informed GDI employees in a memo that the Institute could not meet payroll because of delays in government funding. An internal memo, written by Armstrong and reported by Parker in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* on June 14, 1994 states, “As a result of the suspension of our funding by the government and the time it took to resolve the situation and have the suspension lifted, we have experienced an undue delay in the receipt of our core funding for the months of May and June.”<sup>150</sup>



*Skip Kutz (right) with Harry Daniels, Early 1990s.  
SUNTEP Saskatoon Collection*

Despite these issues, the conditional grant agreement suggests that it was not until September of 1994 that it became evident to those in government that the Institute was experiencing serious financial difficulties. Glenn Lafleur, who now serves as Vice Chair on the GDI Board of Governors, was the Assistant Executive Director at the time. He recalls that the senior

managers worked many late night meetings and developed numerous mock budgets in an effort to make the finances work. “We tried to look at all options,” he said. Finally, government intervened. SETE was approached for assistance. Cash flow was the most significant issue plaguing GDI, to the extent that meeting payroll for staff was in constant jeopardy. To help address the immediate cash flow requirements, SETE advanced the October 1 core grant payment early, in mid-September, 1994. DTI was provided with training dollars in September and October as well in order to help GDI to meet immediate payroll and other critical accounts payable. GDI and DTI signed written agreements that the funds would be returned to their original intended purposes prior to the end of the fiscal year.

As a result of the on-going cash flow problems, staff were laid off in August and September 1994. Administrative and Core Services (Library, Curriculum, and Research) staff were among those hardest hit by layoffs. Even the Director of Finance was laid off at the time. Staff members employed at the Institute at the time recall the difficult



*Isabelle Impey, 2003. GDI Archives*



*GDI Regina, Early 1980s. GDI Archives*

and emotional toll that the layoffs took. Skip Kutz, SUNTEP faculty, was in a unique position as not only a staff member, but also as a union representative. He recalls being “summoned” along with Gary Bartley, the SGEU representative at the time, to Regina to meet with then-Executive Director, Isabelle Impey and the Finance Director Bob Armstrong. They met in Isabelle’s office at the GDI building housed in the former Queen Elizabeth School building on Broadway Avenue in Regina, where SUNTEP, Curriculum, Library, and the head office staff were located.



*Glenn Lafleur, 2011. Peter Beszterda,  
GDI Archives*

Isabelle Impey and Bob Armstrong explained that the Institute was facing a severe financial crisis, and informed Skip Kutz and Gary Bartley of the impending staff layoff. They were in Regina for a couple of days, meeting and discussing the situation, the process, the terms of the collective agreement, and so on. The day before the actual layoffs, staff in the building, who knew something serious was afoot, were informed that the next day there would be a meeting. Finally, the next day, one-by-one, 14 staff members, both in-scope and out-of-scope, were called in and informed



*Marilyn Belhumeur, Mid-1980s. GDI Archives*

that they were being laid off. People who were at the Institute from the very beginning packed their desks and left the building. In total, half of the head office staff were let go that day in Regina. “It was a seriously emotional day. Very, very difficult,” is how Skip Kutz recalls it. In other areas of the province, staff would receive letters informing them that they had been laid off.

To soften the blow, if such a blow can be softened, the laid off in-scope staff were provided, under the terms of the collective agreement, a generous payout of three weeks pay per year of employment. On the negative side, as Skip Kutz notes through his union representative lens, acceptance of the payout meant those staff could not be on the re-employment list. Acceptance of the payout effectively severed their seniority. “Those in-scope staff members were not well-off and so, really, were forced by circumstance to accept the payout. What choice did they have?” notes Skip Kutz. To be fair, at the time of the layoffs, there was no real indication that the Institute would survive the crisis, in which case, the issue of seniority would be moot. And Skip Kutz noted that the agreement for three weeks per year was one of the best union agreements around. Most agreements provided for much less.

*“... senior managers worked many late night meetings and developed numerous mock budgets in an effort to make the finances work.”*

*~Glenn Lafleur*

Marilyn Belhumeur, long-time GDI Regina Library employee and current head Librarian, recalls the layoffs in Regina much the same way as Skip. Of the emotional toll the layoffs had, she notes that it was the worst day of her life. She indicates that the staff knew that something was up, and that there were problems such as the payroll issue, but she did not expect to be laid off that day. Glenn Lafleur, then Assistant Executive Director, also expressed his doubts that the staff really knew what was coming or knew that the crisis was as serious as it was.

Skip Kutz's account of events gives credit for the Institute's salvation to his former wife Pat Atkinson who was the SETE Minister at the time. He says that after the layoffs of the head office staff, Isabelle Impey let him know that the Institute's outlook was grim—essentially, it was a sinking ship and without an immediate influx of funds, it would go under for good. He recalls finding a vacant office in the GDI building and making a call to his ex-wife Pat Atkinson. Based on that call, Isabelle Impey, Pat Atkinson, Gary Bartley, and Skip Kutz went for supper that evening. Isabelle Impey brought along a copy of GDI's most recent financial statement, and they had a frank discussion about the Institute's future. From there, Pat Atkinson took the issue to government.



*Pat Atkinson, 2008. Pat Atkinson*

*“There was a larger vision at stake—a post-secondary institution for Métis people, for young people.”*

*~ Pat Atkinson*

Murray Hamilton gives similar credit to Pat Atkinson. He indicates that there has been “a lot of embellishment” about the MNS role in the bailout, “but really no one from the Métis side had much of an impact on that. That we got bailed out at all had more to do with the intervention of Pat Atkinson. Pat made a decision based on what was good for the Métis community.” As Skip Kutz notes, “there was no negotiation. It was sign the deal or the Institute is finished. The time for negotiation was over.” Glenn Lafleur, who attended the meetings with government after the layoffs, concurs with this view. He notes, “If it was a different Minister, I don't think it would have been saved.” He goes on to say that the while the Institute did have its government supporters there

were others in the provincial cabinet who would have let it go.

Pat Atkinson talks about the GDI crisis and conditional grant agreement in a matter-of-fact, but adamant manner, saying that it was not a matter of the Institute's management, but was rather an issue of governance. "The Institution was sound, the people were very good," she says. "It was not a matter of not having the right people in place." With regard to the decision of whether or not to let the Institute fall, Pat Atkinson says, "This was not going to happen on my watch." She was not prepared to see the Institute go under. "There was a larger vision at stake—a post-secondary institution for Métis people, for young people." In fact, she notes that there was no one in SETE that was saying let this thing go down.

The accounting firm Ernst and Young was engaged to complete an Operations Review for GDI. Financial projections to March 31, 1995 indicated that GDI would not be able to repay its creditors without a restructuring of its debt. GDI had a bank loan with the CIBC that was of particular concern, and the bank had made overtures about calling in the debt, which GDI was not in a position to pay. The reduction in staff in September 1994 helped alleviate the immediate month-to-month expenditures and ensured those bills could be paid, but it did not help to repay the September and October advances from SETE, and it did not assist in repaying the outstanding debt and bank loan. The CIBC loan was at the point of being called in by the bank, but this most drastic measure was forestalled by the fact that SETE intervened with immediate financial assistance and with an Organizational Review plan that would include



*GDI Board, Early 1990s. GDI Archives*



restructuring problematic areas.

Several factors converged that contributed to the financial crisis. The Board at the time was enormous, with 23 members, and it was also highly politicized, with the executive of the GDI Board being appointed from the MNS executive. Board members were involved in the Institute's day-to-day operations and decisions were often based on political goals regardless of whether or not they made sense educationally. The Board was operating

*Administrative expenses to operate this large board ballooned, and ultimately it could not be sustained.*

as a "management board" with the board executive taking on a quasi-managerial role. This caused serious confusion in leadership roles, and it put a lot of pressure on the Institute. Administrative expenses to operate this large board

ballooned, and ultimately it could not be sustained.

In addition, the Institute's mandate was broad and called for a wide array of services and programs from research and curriculum development to library services to the provision of educational programs and cross-cultural awareness training. The Institute was expected by the political body not only to accomplish this broad mandate, but also to take up the dream that the politicians had for a Métis education system in the province. The MNS exerted significant influence on the Institute. In 1993, there were a series of financial transfers from the Institute to the MNS. Furthermore, it was apparent to Institute staff that the annual cultural conference was an unsustainable expense. The conference took place each year from the Institute's inception, and as many as 1,000 people would attend. While the conference in itself was a fantastic means of engaging and connecting with the grassroots of the Métis community, the practicality of such an event was not evident. As Skip Kutz recalls, it seemed clear as early as the late 1980s that the Institute could not afford it, and yet the Institute continued to hold the event annually, and was under political pressure to keep it going. All of these demands were too much for the Institute to handle given the core budget it received from the province. The Institute was trying to conduct activities far beyond what could reasonably be supported.

GDI's managers were also faced with a political board that interfered with the Institute's management on a regular basis and made demands for programs and funds that were simply not sustainable. GDI was viewed as something of a "cash cow" to the political regions, which had little means of raising funds themselves. In addition, the MNS suffered from funding shortages and a certain amount of political turmoil. The situation was not sustainable but, as Glenn Lafleur puts it, "the political will overstepped governance," making it difficult, if not impossible, to make the necessary

changes.

In addition to these issues, a change in federal funding in 1991-1992 meant that critical programming dollars were directed to the Aboriginal Pathways boards, which made arrangements to purchase training from regional colleges, SIAST, and private firms, leaving GDI short on program funding and with the necessity to scale back on staff and other commitments. Until 1993-94, GDI had a contract with CEIC to deliver about \$2 million per year in technical and vocational programming. This represented approximately 25% of the Institute's revenue at the time. At the end of March 1994, this contract came to an end as the federal government moved to the new Pathways strategy. GDI did not react quickly enough to deal with this revenue shortfall. By 1993, the impact of the devolution of federal funding to LMMBs was clear. In 1993, GDI produced a paper called *Potential for Partnership: Gabriel Dumont Institute and Local Métis Management Boards*. The paper delineates the Institute's many successes in education delivery to the Métis communities, and makes the case for a successful partnership between GDI and the LMMBs. In its conclusion, the paper notes that funding received through the Department of Education accounts for "only about 15 percent of the Institute's operating budget. ... The Board and Institute acknowledge that the Gabriel Dumont Institute's survival, as we know it today, will depend upon the funding and partnership ventures it negotiates with the Métis PATHWAYS Program."<sup>151</sup> The document is clearly a plea to the LMMBs to work with GDI in program delivery, but this measure simply was not enough.

Ernst and Young prepared a cash flow analysis that indicated the Institute's total accumulated debt was roughly \$650,000, with no ability to make payments in the short term. They indicated that the CIBC had refrained from calling in its loan partly because SETE had intervened, and together with GDI had promised to present a business plan and a debt-restructuring plan.

The provincial government articulated its interest in supporting GDI through this crisis with the ultimate goal of strengthening the Institute and improving its accountability, not only to funders but to the province's Métis people—the Institute's most important stakeholder group. In addition, the province had its own public relations agenda related to the GDI crisis. At the time, media reports were surfacing which suggested that the MNS was inappropriately using funds, and when the GDI crisis hit, the reports extended that same suspicion to GDI. The government was concerned about the public perception of misuse of tax dollars by a Métis educational institution. They understood clearly that the issue of Aboriginal-controlled education was a low priority and a low interest item

for the mainstream population in general, but that as soon as there was a whiff of impropriety in the administration of public funding by such an institution, public interest would be piqued and a public outcry imminent. It was, therefore, in the interest of the government to show very clearly that GDI was being held accountable and that the Institute would not only be forced to restructure its management and accountability systems, but would indeed pay back the one-time government grant. Through these conditions, the government felt it could appease the general population.

*The government bureaucrats also understood the important role that Aboriginal institutions played in the province in terms of educating Aboriginal students.*

The government bureaucrats also understood the important role that Aboriginal institutions played in the province in terms of educating Aboriginal students. They clearly understood that the public institutions were unable to provide the environment, identity, and support that were so central to the operation of the Aboriginal institutions. The loss of GDI would be a regressive step not only for the Métis, but for the province as a whole. This was not a risk they were prepared to take. In addition, Pat Atkinson notes that the GDI crisis hit at a time when they were starting to do demographic work about labour shortages, retirements, and what the province would look like in the future in terms of the labour market and economy. “The economic data was showing that the Métis people were doing better economically and in employment than their First Nations counterparts. The idea was that it was because of GDI and SUNTEP in particular, that had really contributed to the Métis capacity building in the province.” Not only could the government not afford to let a promising institution like GDI dissolve, the Institute’s own reputation, good work, and positive outcomes helped it weather the storm.

In analyzing this precarious situation, four alternatives different from the proposed repayable conditional grant were outlined by the government, including: 1. do nothing; 2. provide a grant with no expectation of repayment; 3. provide extra funding to GDI on an ongoing basis; and 4. provide debt relief based on acceptance of a third-party government administrator. All four alternatives were rejected for various reasons.

The preferred solution was to provide GDI with a conditional grant and to make that grant repayable over a 10-year period, without interest. Under normal circumstances, a conditional grant from the province would not be repayable. In GDI’s case, it was rationalized that if the grant were not repayable, then the Institute would not learn its lesson. By making

the grant not only conditional upon the restructuring of the Institute's management and administration, but also repayable, the government was accomplishing what it believed public perception would demand—that government take a firm hand with the Métis. This would also accomplish the goal of ensuring that they did not set a “bailout” precedent for other educational institutions.

The department recognized that repaying the conditional grant would be “burdensome” for GDI for the next decade. Ernst and Young



*Collette Robertson, Late 2000s. GDI Archives*

suggested that the burden might be so great that GDI might need assistance to make the payments. Even so, the government rejected providing an outright grant for debt relief, indicating that “there is a need for the organization to realize the consequences of its actions and for a signal that responsible performance is required.”<sup>152</sup> Like a truant child, GDI was expected to learn its lesson through the punishment of a decade of burdensome repayments.

An alternate, less paternalistic explanation is offered by Skip Kutz as a contributing factor to explain the government's choice of a repayable, rather than a non-repayable, grant. He notes that the NDP had been elected just two years prior and had inherited a \$15 billion dollar debt from the Devine government—a debt so great that it nearly bankrupted the province. “The province was in serious trouble at the time,” he recalls. “The New York bankers wanted to make the province declare bankruptcy.” Likewise, Pat Atkinson notes that, “The government didn't have a lot of money at the time. We were dealing with debt and deficit.” What seems clear is that the provincial government wanted the Institute to survive rather than let it go under. Skip Kutz suggested this had to do with the NDP government taking a certain amount of pride in the fact that the Institute was formed under their administration in 1980, and that GDI was seen as a part of the NDP's legacy.

The first and most pressing condition of the grant was to restructure

the Board and to appoint an Executive Director and a financial manager as soon as possible, as both positions had been left vacant. The 1994 Board had 23 people with the executive appointed from the MNS executive. This cross representation from the MNS politicized the board to the extent that decisions were often made based on the MNS' political aspirations, and were not necessarily based on sound educational practice. The link to the Métis political body was, and is, an important link for the Institute. A middle ground whereby GDI maintained this link, but operated as a bona fide and viable educational institution was what was sought. The Institute was often caught between the political vision for a Métis education system, which involved a large and more complicated system of governance, and with the pressing desire to keep it as a functioning and viable education provider. The MNS vision for Métis education in the province involved four Boards—an overall Métis Provincial Board of Education and three separate educational organizations (GDI, DTI, and GDC) each with their own independent board to be appointed by the provincial Métis Board of Education. The costs associated with operating such a system would have been enormous and the administration inefficient.



*Rita Bouvier, Mid-1980s. GDI Archives*

Ultimately, under the conditional grant agreement, the size of the GDI board would be reduced to 7 members plus a chair. Collette Robertson, who is now retired and serves on the GDI Board, was the SETE Institutional Liaison to GDI at the time and had a significant role, along with Murray Hamilton, in drafting the 7-member board criteria. Geordy McCaffrey recalls Collette's role as Institutional Liaison as being critical. "Collette was our advocate in the department. She knew both the community and the department, which was a significant advantage to GDI. On a practical level, she was key to making sure things got done."

A nominating committee, chaired by Rita Bouvier, put names of potential board members forward to be vetted by the MNS and the provincial government. As the provincial education Minister, Pat Atkinson

was responsible for appointing people to the GDI Board following the crisis and the signing of the conditional grant agreement. “It was a difficult thing to do,” she recalls. “You don’t want a lot of blowback from the Métis community. But generally I think the Métis community supported what I did. They knew that this was important, that GDI was one of the most important Métis institutions.”

The SUNTEP contracts were to be renegotiated so that they would be consistently administered, which, in the long run, would save GDI considerable money. The renegotiation of the contracts was linked to payment of debt relief. The tuition and administrative grants were collapsed into one fund payable to GDI, removing SETE’s obligation to cover overruns in tuition and course costs that they had hitherto been obligated to pay. This particular condition benefitted GDI by standardizing the two agreements and providing some protection from unilateral tuition and course cost increases by the universities, but it also benefitted SETE by making GDI, rather than the department, responsible for any tuition cost overruns.

The conditional grant also committed GDI to developing business plans and operating budgets that were within the scope of the funding provided by the provincial budget. This involved restructuring in order to reduce fiscal inefficiencies. In the decade that followed the conditional grant agreement, GDI would be vigilant about this particular condition and operated carefully to maintain a balanced budget.

At the time, the CTR operation was given up as part of the negotiations. While the reasons for GDI wanting to be involved with the CTR were lauded, including the fact that GDI had an interest in making sure the CTR was run by an Aboriginal organization, it was noted that the CTR was far outside of GDI’s educational mandate, and that it had, year over year, operated at a

deficit, contributing to GDI’s financial woes.

*From 1994 to the present, the Institute slowly and steadily built on its ability to operate at a certain arms length from the political structures.*

Up to the point of the conditional grant negotiations, DTI had never been provided with

Saskatchewan Skills Extension Program (SSEP) funds as part of its annual funding allocation from the province. Part of the province’s solution to the Institute’s financial troubles and the federal government’s sudden policy change with respect to funding DTI programs, was to provide DTI with SSEP funds as “seed” money, much like the regional colleges, so that DTI would be able to lever funds from the Pathways boards. This allowed the Institute to compete for contracts to provide training programs to their

own communities, which were being served by the regional colleges and SIAST. This was good news for DTI, and helped it to bring some form of parity with other similar educational institutions in the province.

From 1994 to the present, the Institute slowly and steadily built on its ability to operate at a certain arms length from the political structures. While the linkages to the Métis political body remain important, the GDI Board has taken on an increasingly active role in charting the Institute's course. Significant attention has been focused on GDI's governance since 1994 with satisfying results. In 2008, the provincial government, in cooperation with GDI, conducted an evaluation of the Institute. That evaluation identified GDI's attention to governance and accountability as a major strength of the Institute and praised the Board of Governors as an asset to the institution. "These individuals are described as being of high quality and very dedicated to the success of the Institute. Its current role as a policy board is perceived to be healthy and appropriate, and clearly understood by its members."<sup>153</sup> As Michael Relland, long time GDI employee and SUNTEP Prince Albert Coordinator, notes, in some ways, the conditional grant "was a relief." It helped to stabilize the Institute and shifted its axis ever so slightly—just enough to set it on a new course. As a result, diligence, accountability, and good governance have become watchwords at GDI over the last decade and a half.





## 13 Gabriel Dumont College

Despite undergoing difficult times in 1994, the Institute managed to establish the Gabriel Dumont College (GDC) in the same year. As the 1996 GDI Annual Report notes, “The 1994-1995 fiscal year was a trying time in the history of the Institute ... at the same time it was also an exciting time for Métis education. The Institute undertook a number of initiatives, including the establishment of Gabriel Dumont College, which is affiliated with the University of Saskatchewan.”<sup>154</sup> The affiliation agreement between GDI and University of Saskatchewan (U of S), dated November 18, 1993, notes the principles that the agreement is based on, primarily that both GDI and the U of S are “committed to a partnership that promotes and enhances the understanding of Métis culture, society, values, and beliefs by Métis and non-Métis people.”<sup>155</sup> The agreement envisioned that GDC would enhance the study of Métis culture at the U of S.

The terms of the affiliation agreement are lengthy with 20 terms and conditions listed. These include the continuing independence of each organization; stipulations around course approval and credit; stipulations about policies and regulations for students; academic and personal supports for GDC students; university approval of all instructors for credit courses; adherence to U of S standards for GDC courses and students; tuition for GDC courses; shared faculty salary formula; and conditions for reviewing and amending of the agreement. The agreement also includes a condition for voting members on the two governing bodies: the U of S Senate for GDI and the GDC Board for the U of S. The latter term would become moot because the GDC Board very quickly succumbed to the restructuring in 1994-95.

GDC is incorporated under the *Corporations Act*. In the beginning, it was envisioned that GDC would function with a separate administrative structure with its own board made up of some members from the large GDI Board. In reality, the financial crisis that occurred in 1994 made this vision unmanageable. The GDI Board, which was a 23-member management board prior to 1994, was reduced to 7 members in the restructuring. The new GDI Board then became responsible for overseeing the Institute’s entire business, including subsidiary companies like GDC. Today, the GDI Board of Governors continues to provide this oversight, including approval of GDC’s annual budgets and financial audits.

GDC emerged following the establishment of the U of S Native Studies Department and some disappointment in the Métis community regarding its direction. In a paper entitled *Moving into the Twenty-First Century*:

*Gabriel Dumont College Métis University Education* by Catherine Littlejohn, the author notes that the establishment of the Native Studies Department came on the heels of the federation agreement between the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) and the U of R that created Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC).<sup>156</sup> The U of S, which had given a “cool reception” to the 1976 FSIN federation discussion, decided it was time to look at the creation of a U of S Native Studies Department to accommodate the needs of Aboriginal students at the university.<sup>157</sup> Dr. Kenn Whyte, GDI Executive Director, and Dr. Walter Currie, GDI Assistant Executive Director, were both on the committee that created the Native Studies Department and lent their expertise in designing courses and helping establish the new department.<sup>158</sup> Despite GDI’s involvement in developing the Native Studies Department, once it was up and running the difficulties began. “All of the people from the Métis community including GDI staff were excluded from the implementation of the program ... Métis influence was totally absent in the governance, development and delivery of the courses.”<sup>159</sup> It seems that the very thing that happened to Métis people in the majority of Native Studies programs, both secondary and post-secondary, happened here too—the Métis perspective became an add-on to courses largely centred on First Nations experiences, histories, and cultures. The Métis felt shut out of the Native Studies Department—a department for which they had such high hopes. GDC’s establishment in

*By creating GDC, the Institute was attempting to broaden and increase the post-secondary options available to the Métis community.*

1994 was seen as another attempt by the Métis community “to bring the Métis perspective to the University of Saskatchewan.”<sup>160</sup>

In addition, a document dated July 1995 entitled *Gabriel Dumont College* articulates the desire to move beyond teacher education. It notes that GDI is proud of SUNTEP

students and graduates, but questions whether SUNTEP provides enough programming for the Métis people of Saskatchewan: “While we are experiencing successes in the field of teacher education our people are sorrowfully lacking opportunities in other areas such as engineering and medicine. The Institute recognizes that teaching does not meet the career aspirations of all Métis.”<sup>161</sup> By creating GDC, the Institute was attempting to broaden and increase the post-secondary options available to the Métis community. One of the ways this was to be accomplished was to establish other partnerships similar to the Affiliation Agreement with the U of S College of Arts and Science. In this way, GDC would look to enter into

similar agreements with colleges like Commerce, Medicine, Nursing, Agriculture, Pharmacy, Law, Engineering, Dentistry, Music and Fine Arts, and so on.<sup>162</sup>

It is clear that GDC's ambitions were greater than its achievements in its relatively short history. Without core funding to sustain and advance its vision, GDC has been unable to flourish. It was initially thought that GDC would take SUNTEP Saskatoon and SUNTEP Prince Albert, the two programs under agreement with the U of S, and bring them under its



Michael Relland, Mid-1990s. GDI Archives

corporate structure. It was also envisioned that GDC would develop a strong off-campus delivery component, allowing its courses to be offered in Métis communities across Saskatchewan. Program development for a full Métis Studies complement of courses also figured large in GDC's initial plans. GDC succeeded in securing the U of S's cooperation and support, but SETE's cooperation was vital in those start-up months, but it was not forthcoming. The *Gabriel Dumont College* document outlines not only the importance of developing its own university-accredited courses and programs, but notes "the research, development and accreditation activities required to achieve this goal are time consuming and expensive."<sup>163</sup> Securing funding for this endeavor was critical to GDC's success. Michael Relland, SUNTEP Prince Albert Coordinator, worked as the GDC Director for a couple of years in the late 1990s. He notes that the government was not interested in funding GDC, probably for a couple of reasons, including Institute governance being an issue and the Métis political body also having problems. In addition, the Métis training system funded under the federal Pathways system "was so devolved it was impossible to work with" in terms of securing funding for GDC courses in communities. GDC "just never got off the ground," he says.

In reality, GDC has functioned to offer the Arts and Science courses needed by SUNTEP students. Both SUNTEP students and non-SUNTEP university students enroll in GDC courses. GDC is supported and operated

by GDI and SUNTEP administrative structures, and tuition is received for GDC courses, which is what makes the entity viable. When GDC offers Arts and Science courses, the instructors for those courses are able to adapt and augment the content to be specific to Métis culture, history, and experience.

One area of GDC progress is in the realm of graduate studies. For a number of years, community members and GDI staff and faculty repeatedly noted that graduate studies for Métis people was a potential area of expansion for the Institute. With hundreds of SUNTEP graduates alone, as well as Métis graduates from other colleges and disciplines, it seemed a natural progression to be able to offer Métis-specific graduate programming. In 2006, GDI was in a position to take a step in this direction.

The Board approved a three-year pilot called the *GDC Graduate Student Bursary Program*. The program is independently funded with a \$50,000 annual contribution from GDC. Métis graduate students who undertake a major research thesis or project that relates to Métis people are eligible for the program. The main thrust of the program is to provide financial assistance to encourage Saskatchewan

*The GDC graduate bursary is the only Métis-specific graduate award in Saskatchewan, and nationally, there are very few such awards available specifically to Métis graduate students.*

Métis people to pursue full-time graduate studies, to conduct research in fields related to Métis people, and to increase Métis employment in Saskatchewan and within the Institute. At the end of the three-year pilot, 16 Métis graduate students had been funded for a total of just over \$130,000. The program was independently reviewed in 2009, and the GDI Board passed a motion to continue to offer the program. Under the program, Métis graduate students who meet the criteria are eligible for awards of up to \$10,000 per year, renewable for a second year. The GDC graduate bursary is the only Métis-specific graduate award in Saskatchewan, and nationally, there are very few such awards available specifically to Métis graduate students.

While GDC has been hampered in its development and has had to scale back from its original vision, its overall viability remains. Students actively and continuously register in GDC courses, a Métis-specific perspective is offered in a way that is otherwise absent, and Métis graduate students and their research are being supported. In the future, GDC may find the means to enact some of its former vision for Métis Studies course development and broad community delivery, as well as realize other visions and possibilities.

## 14 GDI Governance and Leadership

In 1980, when the Institute was created, there was a very close connection between GDI and the Métis political body, AMNSIS. Under President Jim Sinclair's direction, AMNSIS had lobbied for four years to see that the Institute would become a reality. The Institute's first board was an interim board until an established "management board" could be brought in. It was the AMNSIS Board, through the Institute's Interim Board, and in accordance with the bylaws, that appointed GDI's first board.

The first board was composed of 23 members—four from the AMNSIS Board, one member from each of the 11 AMNSIS areas, two from the Métis and Non-Status Women's Association, two students, and a representative from each of the universities, the provincial government, and the federal government. On December 18 1980, the new GDI Board was put in place. The Board members were as follows:

From the AMNSIS Board: Jim Sinclair, Jim Durocher, Frank Tompkins, and Dave McKay;

From the Areas: Terry Daniels (Far North), Robert Young (NRII), Mike Durocher (NR III), Anne Dorion (ERI), Martin Genaille (ERII), Merylene Lorenz (ERIIA), Mary Anne Cameron (ERIII), vacant (WRI), Morley Norton (WRIA), Mederic McDougall (WRII), and Bill Fayant (WRIII);

University students: Terri McPhail (SUNTEP, U of R), and Jacqueline Wiebe (SUNTEP, U of S);

From Native Women: Janice Pelletier and Rose Boyer;

University representatives: Blaine Homlund (U of S) and Teal Lowery (U of R);

Provincial government: Gary Wouters; and

Federal government: vacant.

The GDI Board's first executive was as follows:

President: Frank Tomkins

Vice President: Martin Genaille

Secretary: Mike Durocher

Treasurer: Janice Pelletier

At the first regular meeting of the new GDI Board, 19 of its members attended to complete the business of taking over authority and responsibility for the Institute from the Interim Board. Executive



*GDI Board, Early 1990s 2. GDI Archives*

Director Dr. Kenn Whyte and Assistant Executive Director Dr. Walter Currie briefed the new board members on the Institute's functions, programs and plans.<sup>164</sup> The second and third meetings of the GDI Board were poorly attended and failed to meet quorum. Members in attendance met in-committee to discuss the important issue of board attendance. Walter Currie quoted the sentiment from those meetings: "The development of the Gabriel Dumont Institute is a very important thing for Métis and non-status peoples of this province and our work as board members in guiding the development and new programming is very critical ..."<sup>165</sup>

The GDI Board operated as a "management board" with a close connection to the Institute's activities and operations. In addition to the large GDI Board, a number of the incorporated entities that came to be part of GDI functioned with their own secondary boards or committees. For instance, the CTR, established in the 1990s, had its own board of directors as reported in a number of annual reports. Similarly, when GDC was established in 1994, it was envisioned that it would function with a separate board made up of some members from the large GDI Board. SUNTEP operated for many years with a special Review Committee that reported to the main GDI Board and contributed to the Institute's annual reports.

In 1994, after the Institute's financial crisis forced GDI to sign a conditional grant agreement with the province, the size of the board was drastically reduced as part of the agreement. The 23-member board was dissolved and replaced with a 7-member board. In addition, the activities of separate sub-boards such as those mentioned above for CTR and GDC

were rolled into the function of the main GDI Board. The GDI Board today continues to have oversight for all aspects of the Institute, including the incorporated entities.

Pat Atkinson was the SETE Minister at the time of the 1994 conditional grant agreement. She indicates that she holds a real interest in governance. “It’s an area where I have a lot of expertise,” she says. “I’ve done a lot of work in that area and my interest and expertise has developed over time.” She sees governance as an issue of capacity building—in order for individuals to govern institutions they have to have skills, expertise, accountability, and responsibility. It’s part of ministerial oversight to assist organizations to develop.

With regard to GDI governance, Pat Atkinson notes that it was developmental. “You have a group of people whose hearts are in the right place, who care passionately about Métis education and making sure Métis people can take their place in society,” she said. When the crisis hit in 1994 Pat Atkinson was the minister responsible. “The Institution was sound, the people were very good. It was not a matter of not having the right people in place.” Likewise, Wayne McKenzie, who was the AMNSIS Executive Director at the time that GDI was formed, supports the idea that the Institute’s managers “were a stabilizing force” from the outset. He suggests that the board should have been eventually comprised of the Institute’s alumni. He says that over time, “The people with university degrees should have taken over the governance roles for GDI.” Pat Atkinson echoes this sentiment, saying that over the years she had met all kinds of people who had gone through GDI and who had the skill sets to serve on the board. She knew those people were out in the communities. When the Institute came under its conditional grant agreement in 1994 and new governors were selected, Pat Atkinson had a hand in selecting these skilled Métis people.

The reduction of the board from 23 to 7, under the conditional grant agreement in 1994, effectively slashed costs associated with meetings and per diem expenses. While this proved to be a stabilizing move for the Institute, it was not popular with the Métis community representatives. During his time as Chair of the GDI Board in 1998-2000 Murray Hamilton, who was also the MNS Vice-President at the time, recalls receiving countless phone calls from people who were unhappy with the GDI board structure. Complaints were mainly focused on the notion that the provincial government had too much control over the institution.

In 2002, the conditional grant was amended and the board was restructured to include 13-directors. Today, the GDI Board includes 12 members plus a chair who is the MNS Education Minister.

The ties to the Métis political body are important, but can also be a source of angst. In 2005, the MNS was in a crisis regarding the results of its 2004 election. The 2004 election was determined to be fraudulent, and the MNS had its funding frozen. A January 2005 *Wind Speaker* article by Cheryl Petten outlines the federal funding freeze to the MNS and the reasons for it. “The funding freeze comes after a controversial election held by the MNS in May 2004. Members of the group complained about voting irregularities, and a provincial report on the election concluded that neither the Saskatchewan government nor the Metis people could have faith in the election results.”<sup>166</sup>

In order to ensure that the Institute’s positive work continued and its student body and staff were unaffected by the election’s irregularities, GDI’s Board immediately took several steps to strengthen its governance. Several policy and bylaw changes were made. These included, staggering board appointments so that future board changes were made in a gradual and orderly fashion. The board member terms were lengthened so that appointments could not be made during the MNS election controversy. The board also implemented code of ethics, code of conduct, and conflict of interest policies for itself. The Saskatchewan Minister of Learning retained approval of all new board appointments. The Institute made certain that the political turmoil steered clear of the Institute. In 2007, a legitimate Métis election was held and GDI was able to resume its relationship with the MNS, including having an appointed MNS Minister of Education sit as the chair of the GDI Board of Governors.

Since 1994, the Institute has slowly but steadily operated with a certain arms-length from Métis political structures. It has developed a clear separation from the Métis political structure. The GDI Board has taken a more active role charting the Institute’s direction. In 2005, bylaw changes made at an Annual General Meeting included changing references to the GDI Board as a “management board” to a “governance board,” which had the effect of shifting the board’s focus to be in line with current good governance practices. The GDI Board’s commitment, and the training and professional development that its members receive make the future look very bright.

In 2008, EKOS Research Associates conducted an independent evaluation of the Institute. The following was said about the board, “The current Board of Governors are a strength of the institution. These individuals are described as being of high quality and very dedicated to the success of the Institute. Its current role as a policy board is perceived to be healthy and appropriate, and clearly understood by its members.”<sup>167</sup> “Among its strengths is the Institute’s current direction, which emphasizes strategic



planning, sensitivity to community needs, willingness to collaborate with other institutions ... as well as being attentive to governance and accountability.”<sup>168</sup>

Currently, GDI operates with a 12-member Board of Governors plus a Chairperson who is the MN—S Minister of Education. Each of the GDI Governors is selected from each of the 12 MN—S Regions. All Board members go through a three-step process for appointment that includes nomination at a Regional Council meeting, followed by ratification and approval by the Provincial Métis Council. Finally, approval by the Saskatchewan Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration (AEEI) is required before an individual is officially appointed to the board.

The current GDI Board (2011) is as follows:

Chair: Vacant

Vice Chair: Glenn Lafleur, Northern Region I

Secretary: Tammy Mah, Western Region II

Treasurer: Vacant

Members: Bernice Aramenko, Northern Region III

Guy Blondeau, Eastern Region III

Michael Bell, Western Region I

Viola Bell, Eastern Region II

Jackie Kennedy, Western Region IA

Collette Robertson, Western Region III

Shirley Ross, Western Region IIA

Gerald St. Pierre, Eastern Region IIA

Paul Trottier, Eastern Region I

Vacant, Northern Region II

The Board of Governors oversees the Institute’s direction and is responsible for its operation and governance, including:

- adopting policies for GDI’s effective operation;
- formulating a strategic plan and overseeing its implementation;
- approving annual budgets, audits, and programs;
- functioning as GDI ambassadors, and encouraging students, and potential students in their study and career plans;
- representing GDI to all levels of government, persons of Métis ancestry, and to the public generally; and
- appointing a CEO to be directly responsible for the implementation of policy and GDI’s day-to-day management and operations.

All GDI Governors are Métis people who possess knowledge of the cultural, historical and social circumstances of Saskatchewan's Métis. The collective skills of the Board of Directors represent a number of different disciplines and perspectives. Some of the skill set and training areas include education, finance and administration, business, human resources, law, and communications, which taken together ensure a wide range of skills and perspectives.

GDI's leadership also includes its Executive Directors. To date, GDI has had a total of 11 Executive Directors, including those in an acting role and one pair of "Co-Acting" Executive Directors.

Up to the present time, the longest serving Executive Director is



*Christopher LaFontaine, Early 1990s 2. GDI Archives*

the current CEO, Geordy McCaffrey, who has been in the position since 2003. In terms of institutional leadership, two Executive Directors have had long tenures—Geordy McCaffrey, as mentioned, and Christopher LaFontaine, who was Executive Director from 1985 to 1991.

Each of the Executive Directors has made their own unique mark on the Institute.

For instance, the first Executive Director, Kenneth Whyte is credited with bringing stability to the new institution and with building solid relationships in the professional communities in which GDI operated. In this way, the Institute's reputation was on solid ground from the

very beginning.

Beverly Cardinal, a well-respected and talented Métis

bureaucrat whose successful career with the province culminated with her appointment as the province's Assistant Cabinet Secretary, was GDI's Acting Executive Director first in the '80s and again in the early '90s. It was under her watch that the agreement to establish DTI was successfully negotiated.

Keith Goulet, who would go on to have a successful 17-year career in provincial politics as the NDP MLA for Cumberland and as the first Métis cabinet minister in Saskatchewan, was GDI's Executive Director during



*Beverly Cardinal. Source, Beverly Cardinal*



*Keith Goulet, Mid-1990s. GDI Archives*

the centenary celebrations of the 1885 Northwest Resistance, and helped the Institute successfully celebrate those events. Later in his career as a provincial politician, Keith Goulet would be involved with GDI via his political role in the Ministry of Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment.

Robert Devrome was GDI Executive Director immediately following the 1994 crisis, and was the leader in place when GDC was incorporated and the affiliation agreement with the U of S was successfully negotiated.

Karon Shmon was GDI Executive Director at a time when the issue of pay equity came to the fore in the Institute. Under her leadership, the Institute was able to negotiate a compensation package that put GDI employees on par with those in other similar post-secondary institutions in the province.

Geordy McCaffrey, GDI's longest serving Executive Director, can be credited with paying special attention to the Institute's governance, strengthening governance structures, and the Institute's reputation. In addition, he led the Institute in its bid for federal employment and training contracts and established GDI Training & Employment. Under his leadership, GDI has increased its revenues over 300% and tripled its human resource base.



*Karon Shmon, 1998.  
GDI Archives*



*Geordy McCaffrey, 2010.  
GDI Archives*

Below are the complete dates and biographies of past GDI Executive Directors.

Kenneth Whyte (1980-1984)

Tim Pynch (1984, Acting)

Beverly Cardinal (1984, Co-Acting)

Richard Thatcher (1984, Co-Acting)

Keith Goulet (1984-1985)

Christopher LaFontaine (1985-1991, Acting and Full-Time)

Beverly Cardinal (1991-92, Acting)

Isabelle Impey (1993-1994)

Robert Devrome (1994-1998)

Karon Shmon (1998-2000)

Calvin Racette (2000-2003)

Geordy McCaffrey (2003-Present)

### **Kenneth Whyte (1980-1984)**

Dr. Kenneth Whyte was the Institute's founding Executive Director. Now retired, he has lived in northwest British Columbia for the last 22 years where he has worked as a research education and development consultant. During his tenure, GDI grew from a conceptualisation to a highly respected model of educational research and programming. At the time of his departure, there were 55 staff members in five distinct programs. These programs were in operation in five distinct locations throughout the province with an enrolment of 230 students.

### **Timothy Pynch (1984)**

Dr. Timothy Pynch was an Acting Executive Director in 1984. He has been involved in education for 35 years. A historian by training, he is a Professor Emeritus of Social Work at the University of Calgary. Committed to community development programs, he has worked in three Aboriginal-directed educational institutions and political bodies. As the first Acting Executive Director, GDI continued to expand its programming, and he worked to further stabilize the Institute.

### **Beverly Cardinal (1984, Co-Acting) (1991-92, Acting)**

Beverly Cardinal served as Acting Executive Director in 1984 and 1991-1992—both periods were politically tumultuous. A member of Regina's Métis community, she actively serves on numerous committees and boards. As Executive Director, she worked with co-Acting Executive Director Dr. Richard Thatcher and others to successfully negotiate a stronger core funding agreement for the Institute in 1984, and during her second tenure, she led the team that successfully negotiated the agreement with the provincial government to establish DTI. She notes that her experiences leading GDI provided some of the best possible training for her career.

### **Richard Thatcher (1984, Co-Acting)**

In the mid-1980s, Dr. Richard Thatcher served as GDI's Acting Co-Executive Director with Bev Cardinal. Previously, he was GDI's Research and Community Development Coordinator and wrote proposals and designed programs for community-based adult education, job training, and occupational training programs. He is presently a successful consultant living in southern Saskatchewan. As GDI's Co-Executive Director, he is very proud of his role in helping young Métis obtain meaningful careers, and in keeping the Institute free of political interference.

**Keith Goulet (1984-1985)**

Keith Goulet is a Nehinuw Cree-Métis educator and politician from Cumberland House, Saskatchewan. Prior to becoming Executive Director, he was a teacher, a Cree-language consultant, a teacher education program developer, and community college principal. He was also a provincial NDP MLA from 1986-2003. During the time he was Cabinet Minister, 1992-2001, *The Métis Act* was passed. As Executive Director, he guided the Institute through a period of program growth, regional delivery and the greater participation of Métis locals at the annual assemblies. He led GDI's efforts to celebrate the centenary of the 1885 Resistance.

**Christopher LaFontaine (1985-1991)**

Christopher LaFontaine is a Non-Status Indian from Lestock, Saskatchewan. Before becoming Acting and then full-time Executive Director, he was Assistant Executive Director, and had been a long-term AMNSIS activist. A dedicated community volunteer, a father of five talented children, and a career pathing consultant, he sits on various committees in Regina, and is the Executive Director of the (Saskatchewan) Aboriginal Court Worker Program. He was GDI's Executive Director during a period of unprecedented growth.

**Isabelle Impey (1993-1994)**

Isabelle Impey is a Métis from Prince Albert with roots in Cumberland House, Saskatchewan. A well-known and talented beadwork artisan, she was the recipient of an *Aboriginal Woman of Distinction Award* in 2009. During a dark period of the Institute's history in the mid-1990s, she agreed to serve as Executive Director. GDI had overreached and expanded too quickly, and a corporate downsizing was necessary to save the Institute. She oversaw this process and once it was completed, she left this position.

**Robert Devrome (1994-1998)**

Dr. Robert Devrome was Acting Executive Director in the mid-to-late 1990s. Prior to becoming Acting Executive Director, he was the Institute's Director of University Programs. A long-time consultant specializing in Aboriginal educational issues, he was the Board Chair for the Saskatchewan Pension Plan for much of the past decade. During his tenure as GDI's Executive Director, he negotiated the affiliation agreement with the U of S that created GDC, the first Métis-controlled college of its kind in Canada.

**Karon Shmon (1998-2000)**

Karon Shmon is a Métis from Saskatoon with roots in the Chitek Lake, Saskatchewan region. An educator and consultant, she has worked for more than 30 years to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students, and has informed the larger society about Aboriginal-specific education and cultural issues. She is currently the Institute's Director of Publishing. During her tenure as Executive Director, she guided a compensation review which resulted in the Institute's employees receiving a pay equity package that put them on par with their colleagues in similar institutions in Saskatchewan.

**Calvin Racette (2000-2003)**

Calvin Racette is a Cree Métis from the Qu'Appelle Valley in southern Saskatchewan. Calvin has worked in the area of First Nations and Métis education for approximately 25 years, serving on numerous committees and supporting First Nations and Métis curriculum and community-based initiatives. He currently works for Regina Public Schools as the Aboriginal Education Coordinator. As GDI Executive Director, he feels his greatest accomplishments were in the areas of policy development and accountability.

**Geordy McCaffrey (2003-Present)**

Geordy McCaffrey is from the North Battleford, Saskatchewan area. A proud GDI alumnus, he places great value in graduating from the SUNTEP program and strives to provide similar opportunities for other Métis students. A long-term GDI employee, he has been Executive Director since 2003. As Executive Director, he serves on a variety of boards and commissions. During his tenure as Executive Director, GDI has grown substantially and its governance structures have become more accountable and professionalized.

Over the years, GDI's Board of Directors and Executive Directors have provided strong and effective leadership. This has greatly enabled the Institute to steadily advance its agenda to provide quality education and training to Métis communities in Saskatchewan. Without the strong leadership provided by both the Board of Governors and the Executive Directors, the Institute would not enjoy the solid, professional reputation that it has among other post-secondary institutions, with government, and most importantly, in the communities that we serve.

## Conclusion

GDI's early dreamers, founders, and builders had an amazing vision for Métis people in this province—a vision that involved self-directed and self-governing institutions that would form the core of a strong Métis self-governance system. This vision for the Institute was ambitious and far-reaching. The drive to achieve this mission—a Métis controlled educational and cultural institution—was the result of the tireless efforts of the political leadership and the grassroots people in communities. It was a hard-won fight to establish GDI, and it took decades to build the Institute to its current status as the largest and most well established Métis post-secondary institution in Canada. All the people involved in its building and long-term growth, including those from the Métis community, the political body, the education system, government, students, staff, and alumni should be proud of GDI and its accomplishments.

For 30 years, GDI has consistently delivered on its mandate to provide high quality cultural and educational programs and services to the Métis people of Saskatchewan. GDI has a very distinguished and proud record, including having thousands of graduates across Saskatchewan and making innumerable contributions to the education system through the production and publication of Métis-specific curriculum and learning resources. The Institute is also a unique institution—there is no equivalent Métis educational and cultural institution in Canada.

The people and government of the province have good reason to hold GDI up as an example of a successful Aboriginal-run educational institution. GDI contributes to the province's social and economic fabric by engaging Métis people in training and education, preparing them for the labour market, and fostering them as citizens of the Métis Nation and the province. Both Métis students and staff are drawn to GDI because of the Institute's important cultural aspects and because of the comfort they feel in being a part of a Métis institution. Métis people in this province very much feel like the Institute's owners. GDI continues to be the place where we know we belong.





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In the early 1970s Saskatchewan was a hotbed of Native activism. Inspired by examples from the Red Power and American Indian movements, Saskatchewan's Métis and Non-Status Indians took up various forms of public protest, including road blocks, sit-ins, and occupations of government buildings as a means of drawing attention to the most pressing Native issues. Jobs and education were top concerns; Native people were faced with harsh economic and social conditions, and Native leaders could see that education was the key to improving peoples' lives. The activism of the early '70s sowed the seeds for the eventual development of the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI)—Canada's first, largest, and most prominent Métis institute. Breaking ground as the first wholly-owned and operated Métis-specific Institute, GDI is also unique because of its dual focus to provide for the education and training needs of the province's Métis and to preserve and promote Métis history and culture.

In clear and precise prose, Lisa Bird-Wilson chronicles the Institute's history from the early activism of the '70s to the celebration of the Institute's 30th anniversary in 2010. Her account includes details of a financial crisis that nearly killed the Institute and the rebuilding that followed. Based on personal interviews with many of the Institute's founders and champions, Bird-Wilson paints a compelling picture of the issues, the times, and the people involved with building one of the Métis Nation's treasures.

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