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THOMAS MAJOR

Thomas Major, a Regina resident, was one of the Metis involved in the early Metis organizations of the province. He was, at one time, president of the Metis Society of Saskatchewan, formerly known as the Halfbreeds of the Province of Saskatchewan.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Organization of the Metis people in the 1930s.
- Development of the Metis Society; splits within the group; falling off of interest during and after the Second World War.
- Brief contact with Malcolm Norris.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Tom Major of Lebret (now Regina) was one of the earliest members of the Metis Society of Saskatchewan - first known as "The Halfbreeds of Saskatchewan." This organization was formed in 1931-32 by Metis in Regina and the immediate area around Regina such as Lebret, Qu'Appelle and Lestock. Major talks about why the organization was first formed, its goals, its organization and members and its history from 1932 to 1941 when he became inactive.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I'm talking to Mr. Tommy Major of Regina. Tom, we were talking yesterday about the MSS and that it was first organized in 1931. Can you explain what motivated that? Why did people want to organize the Metis Society?

Tom: Well, they knew of these claims that they had at that time, you know. And so, they were organizing to see if there was anything they had coming, that is the Metis people of this province.

Murray: Right, this was to do with scrip, wasn't it?

Tom: With scrip, yeah. This is what it was all about. It wasn't really housing them days, which might have come in later on but first of all, we wanted to find if we really had any land coming to us and stuff like that. Because when it was cut off in 1905 was the last time that they give scrips in this province. From then on, what happened? This is what we were trying to find out. We knew what happened up to 1905 but from there on is where we didn't know what happened, you see. So we took this up in 1931. We were trying to follow up these land scrips, why we didn't get them, why we didn't receive them.

Murray: You mentioned the year 1928 when we talked yesterday. What significance did that year have?

Tom: 1928, now you got me. 1928.

Murray: It may not have been important.

Tom: No, maybe not.

Murray: I'm wondering, who were the people first involved in organizing?

Tom: Well, the first ones really that I, well, there was Ross.

Murray: That was Joe Ross?

Tom: Ross. A fellow by the name of Knutson, he's dead now, Martin Knutson. J.Z. La Rocque, myself. There was two MacKenzies. They are both dead. I know they are both dead. Well, we started up here in the city of Regina. We started talking about this in 1930/31, see. And then in 1931 then we started organizing.

Murray: In Regina?

Tom: In Regina first, yes. It started off in Regina. And people, they were glad because there was lots of old people then still alive you see.

Murray: Who remembered all these things?

Tom: Who remembered all this stuff? So we had a lot of help that way. So then, we got out into the country, you see. And we run into Solomon Pritchard who knew everything about this, you understand. What it was all about. Old Solomon was a pretty well-posted man and he give us a lot of help. And then there was the McGillises and Beaudrys up at Willowbunch.

Murray: Now Solomon Pritchard was from Baljennie.

Tom: Baljennie, yes. That's just out of Battleford here. And there was these fellows from Willowbunch. They give us a lot of help. For a fact you see, at one time they were mail carriers, stagecoach. They were stagecoach drivers and everything, you see, these McGillis and Beaudrys and all that.

Murray: So they would know all the Metis people around?

Tom: They knew all the Metis people, yeah. And then we got in further north where we run into these Saint Denis up in Prince Albert. The old fellow was a Mounted Police. So he had a good idea of what had happened, see. And with the little knowledge... oh, I was talking about my uncle that died in 1928 maybe.

Murray: Maybe that was it.

Tom: Well, Gardapy (Gariepy?), now he told me an awful lot about it because he had fought in the Red River Rebellion, or in the Batoche Rebellion. He had fought there, you see, so he gave me quite a bit and I brought that in and it was all put together.

Murray: So this was all the experiences these people had had with the government and scrip and all those things?

Tom: Yeah, that's right. So, then by this time this Gardapy (Gariepy?) died in 1928. That's what I was talking about maybe, you see. And he had fought in that as a young man. And it kept going. Finally we, as I said, Ross became the president of this organization here in Regina.

Murray: This was in 1931, eh?

Tom: That was in - well, no. It took until about 1932.

Murray: Oh, I see.

Tom: To organize.

Murray: To get a real organization.

Tom: First of all, to get everything started. I mean, we had to get everything together first. What are we organizing for? Who are we going to have in there? All this sort of stuff. Now, we took all of 1931 to do that. So finally we had enough

to call a meeting in 1932 and this is where Ross became the president.

Murray: Right. Now was that organization just for Regina or was that...?

Tom: It was just at that time, yes. At that time. It was just like a more or less, I don't know what you would call it. Whether it was just Regina, I wouldn't say it was just for Regina.

Murray: But it was close to Regina, so people like...

Tom: Like maybe around in here because we didn't know that much about what we were driving at.

Murray: It was just a start.

Tom: Yes, it was just a start. So, Ross became the what do you call it?

Murray: President.

Tom: The president and Joseph La Rocque, J.Z. La Rocque became the vice-president and I forget whether this Knutson was secretary as that time. And then the rest of us were all like more executives, see. This was in the spring of 1932 when we started then to organize. And about July, Ross come to me and he says, "You know," he says, "I could do more good if I can get out on the road." He says, "Instead of being the president, I'll resign on it and I'll become the organizer." On account of this pass that he had, you see.

Murray: Could you explain that? Why did he have that? It was a railway pass he had?

Tom: Well, no, he had both. He had a bus and railroad. He could travel on that because he was blind.

Murray: I see, and the government had given him this, eh?

Tom: I guess he got that through the CNIB.

Murray: Oh, I see.

Tom: I think he was the president of the CNIB at the time. He had something to do with the CNIB. So that's how he got this pass. Now he says, "I could make use of this pass, and it'll help us out." Because we have no money, to tell you the truth, we had no money. What we used to charge was ten cents a month.

Murray: For membership?

Tom: Membership, see. Well, that didn't bring you too much money to start with, see. And this is how Ross got around.

Murray: This was about July in 1932, was it?

Tom: July of 1932. Now from there, I just forget who was president from there on.

Murray: Can you remember how many people would have been members in....?

Tom: Oh yeah, there was about fifty, sixty at that time. Then it was starting to get good.

Murray: And it wasn't until then that you went up to Baljennie and...?

Tom: Yes, it was right then that Ross went. Now he started to travel then and all that summer like, well, from July and

August and September, he travelled all through, you see. He was able to get around pretty fast with this pass of his. And this is when he started bringing these other people in. So, you see, we couldn't afford... you see, we had a general meeting. We couldn't call it a convention but we had a general meeting from people like Saul Pritchards from over there and old McGillis and what do you call them. We had what they call a general meeting in the city of Regina.

Murray: Right. What month would that have been?

Tom: That would have been about, oh, I would say about December.

Murray: Of 1932?

Tom: Of 1932. Then we explained to them what we were doing. And they give us a lot of help, this old Pritchard, and they give us a lot of help. Because really we didn't know that much about what we were driving at.

Murray: You knew there was a problem but you didn't have the information.

Tom: Yes, and by golly, you know, it sprang up from there. And then in 1933, we had another convention which brought in I bet you over 150 by this time.

Murray: And this was in Regina too, was it?

Tom: In Regina too because we had no other place to go. But then we started to scatter after that. I mean, we held

meetings here and there. For a fact, when I got in as president, that was what, in 1937 or '38, I just forget. It was held in Saskatoon then because we wanted to spread it out.

Murray: Right, so people wouldn't always have to travel.

Tom: That's right. By this time, you see, we had organized good enough that we had a provincial organization.

Murray: What year would that have taken place, where you actually had a provincial organization?

Tom: About 1935, 1934 or '35. But it wasn't, you know, documented as...

Murray: As an organization.

Tom: As an organization. What I mean to say you have to put that red seal on there. It wasn't done till about...

Murray: 1937, I think.

Tom: Was it 1937? That's what I thought. I'm not sure. 1937.

Murray: But there was a provincial executive was there?

Tom: There was, there was, yeah.

Murray: And when did that provincial executive get elected? That would have been 1934 or '35 then?

Tom: That was about 1936 and then in 1937, then we presented this to the government under W.J. Patterson. He was here at the time. He was premier of this province.

Murray: By that time, how many locals do you think you would've had?

Tom: At that time, I would say we had about... You see, we had to show a membership of so many people and at that time, we passed the deadline of so many. And locals, I would say we had about 25-30 locals at the time. And a membership of about 350 when we presented. So when we got this, you know, this constitution all, it took us a long time. I'll tell you why it took us so long. We weren't educated at that point. There was the odd one of us that had a bit of education so it took us a long time to draw up this brief, you understand. Like the constitution and bylaws and...

Murray: This was all on your own...?

Tom: This was all on our own. We never got help from nobody. We never got help, not five cents from anybody. And then we got our constitution and then we had it all. Then the people started coming to us. Then we knew.

Murray: Outside people?

Tom: Outside people then started coming to us. People had heard about it through friends and everything and we had a big meeting in Regina in 1937 and then we picked our officers and

they are the ones that presented it to the Saskatchewan government for approval, you see.

Murray: Right.

Tom: Now, that's how that went. Well, in 1941 we had a membership of 2800. Now, these were Metis people. And this was all we could find in the province of Saskatchewan. In 1941, there was 2800 people.

Murray: Right. Let me go back just a bit and we'll get back to that year. There are a few questions here I'd like to ask you about the earlier years. It's interesting, you mentioned earlier that the first meeting had been held in the Ruby Cafe, would that be the December 1932 meeting? Or would it have been earlier than that?

Tom: Well, we held some in houses, you know.

Murray: This was in the early...?

Tom: Yeah, yeah. But then when we went to the Ruby. It was about 1932 I would say that we went in there. Yeah.

Murray: It's interesting that you mentioned that December 1932 was really your first meeting of people from around the province.

Tom: That's right, that's right.

Murray: Because that's exactly the same time that the first meeting of the Alberta Metis Association took place.

Tom: Is that right?

Murray: December, 1932.

Tom: Well, yes, I think that was, that's true.

Murray: Did people then know about the organization that was happening in Alberta?

Tom: Yes. There was some had known about it that we were starting in Saskatchewan. Then I think you'll find that Manitoba might have been one year ahead of us in starting to organize.

Murray: Right. Was there any contact between yourselves and people in Alberta?

Tom: Not then. Not till after we had our constitution.

Murray: Yeah.

Tom: Then...

Murray: There was a letter I think. There was some writing

between Brady and people in your organization because I remember reading a letter referring to a letter that Brady had written in 1940.

Tom: In 1940, yes. I guess it could have been, yeah.

Murray: It might have been earlier than that.

Tom: Because in 1938 is when... are you sure it wasn't...?

Murray: Well, it may have been earlier than that.

Tom: 1940, that's true. That's when we went to Winnipeg wasn't it?

Murray: Well, yeah. There was a man named Samuel Nolt that was there.

Tom: Nolt, yeah, yeah. Yes, that's right. That's the year that we went to Manitoba. And Alberta come with us then, you know. But then they decided there that if this was to be, Saskatchewan should have been the central place because this is where the last rebellion had taken place. You understand? And they agreed that Saskatchewan would be the middle point to start. That would be what they called a west....

Murray: A Western Dominion Organization?

Tom: A Western Dominion, yeah. Mind you, this wasn't finalized as to be the Western Dominion. You see, that was in 1940. In 1941 then most of us were gone - 1939 a lot of them had left by this time, going to war.

Murray: That organization never really got off the ground?

Tom: It never did get off the ground.

Murray: But it was meant to be an organization encompassing the three provinces?

Tom: Yes. You see, at that time, why British Columbia wasn't mentioned because we didn't know British Columbia. I had been there in the early '30s, I was in British Columbia. But you know, I don't think you could find a Metis in British Columbia at that time.

Murray: You could find non-status Indians but not Metis.

Tom: No, no, I don't think you could find non-status, no, no. You would find the Indian but I don't think you could have found the non-status in there. You see, here in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, there was no non-status Indians till 1940.

Murray: Right.

Tom: See, the war done all this. They started coming off the reserves and everything see. And this way you got the non-status, otherwise there wasn't any. Now today is what I'm going to get to this. Today you could find what, about 5000, 10,000 Metis people because these are not the people of the Red River, what you would call. These are new ones made since the...

Murray: Right, since the Red River.

Tom: Yes. Now, here's another thing again. We'll just say for me for instance, just for an instant. Like, see, my grandmother, she was Orval Grant's(?) daughter, that's my grandmother. And on my father's side was an Englishman, you understand. And my mother and dad got married. One had English blood in them and the other one had Scotch blood in them. See, that made the halfbreed, isn't it?

Murray: Right.

Tom: Alright. So we carry on from there. My mother and dad got married. What would you call me then? See, I'm still some halfbreed, isn't it. But what kind of a halfbreed?

Murray: A quarterbreed?

Tom: A quarterbreed. That goes to her too, now. See, like our grandfathers and our great-grandfathers, put it that way, they come and married the squaws, you understand?

Murray: Right.

Tom: Now, that's where our grandfathers come from then. Alright then, see, then they stopped that. I mean, they didn't stop it but these Indian women couldn't go back to the reserve, you see. And they had these kids. Then another white man would take over and then finally there was these two halfbreeds, you see. So there has got to be a program somewheres, you see. That's what I can't understand now. We had an awful argument about that.

Murray: Among the leaders.

Tom: Amongst us like, yeah. What is a halfbreed? And you know the answer they come up with? You see, the English people, now that was the bloody old Zach Hamilton again. He didn't like the word 'breed' because the English was mixed up in it, you understand. He says, "They are a good class of people." I says, "You tell us where they are a good class of people." You understand what I mean? I says, "You tell us

where they are a good class of people. We don't know. They could have been bank robbers, they could have been anything but they are still our relations and that's the breed that we're following," I says. "Now," I says, "if you could tell us what we are..." Then they come up with the word 'Metis'. You know

what that means?

Murray: It means mixed blood.

Tom: No, not exactly that. The way they have it in the dictionary, as far as we found out, it's the white blood flowing in the red.

Murray: Oh, I see.

Tom: Yeah. Metis, that's a Spanish word. He had enough boys. He worked on these old McGillises then. That was some in-laws of his, this old Zach Hamilton. I know his wife had some breed in her, you know. And he worked on these people so much that they finally put the Metis in there.

Murray: Instead of halfbreed?

Tom: Instead of the halfbreed. We started off as halfbreeds, see.

Murray: Was that the name of your organization to start with?

Tom: That's what it was, yeah.

Murray: What was the name of the organization?

Tom: Well, it was the Halfbreeds of the Province of Saskatchewan.

Murray: That was the name of the organization, eh?

Tom: That was the way we... see, we were green when we started. As I told you, we didn't have... not too much education.

Murray: Right, but by 1937 the organization changed to the Metis Society.

Tom: It was the Metis Society, yeah. You see, why we put the society, we could have put organization in there. We could have put anything in there, but we figured people will run away from us. You understand what I mean? In 1931, back in the twenties, there was still a lot of word about the last rebellion and every time we moved, "Oh, it's going to be another rebellion."

Murray: And you'd frighten off the Metis, too.

Tom: Yeah. So then we come up with the word society which was a milder word for...

Murray: For what you were really doing.

Tom: For what we were really doing. We thought let's be mild about this thing. If anybody says anything to you, don't say

anything. Just say, "We belong to the Metis Society," you see. In the province of Saskatchewan. And I'm sure in our first constitution there is everything in there. There is everything in there. No revolutions or anything and there would be no religions or anything like that, you see.

Murray: It was a non-partisan...?

Tom: Non-partisan altogether.

Murray: Right. You mentioned that yesterday, that you were determined not to be radical. Is that the reason, that you didn't want to frighten people away?

Tom: Yes, that's it. We didn't want to frighten the people away because, you see, them bells were still ringing over there. Today they forget, people don't know today. I'll bet you you could phone a hundred people here in the city of Regina, "When did that rebellion take place in Batoche?" They wouldn't have a clue.

Murray: But in those days it was...

Tom: But in those days it was still ringing in the ears of the white people, you see. A lot of them farmers, you'll hear that once in a while. How they were scared of the Indians and the halfbreeds.

Murray: And that was still true in the thirties?

Tom: That was it. Still some of them old ladies, you know, that lived. Say, they are 90 years old today. They still know that there was some war going on between the halfbreeds and the white, you see. And I guess they were pretty scared at times.

Murray: So you used the word society. Was it mostly because the whites would get upset or because...?

Tom: That's right.

Murray: Was it also because the Metis were nervous about that idea or was it mostly the whites?

Tom: We were nervous about the idea of putting in anything but society in there, you see. And then they couldn't come up here and they says, "Well, this could turn out to be anything." Like, the organization could mean anything. You could organize a war, you can organize anything.

Murray: A political party or...

Tom: We thought society would be just about as clean a word as we could use.

Murray: That's a neutral word.

Tom: It's a very neutral word, yeah. You see, that's why we brought that in there.

Murray: Right. During those years up to 1937, how did you make your demands and your goals known to government?

Tom: We didn't.

Murray: You didn't? It was just among yourselves...?

Tom: It was just amongst ourselves because we had nothing to go to the government for. Mind you, the odd time we went to the government and asked them for a bit of social aid for somebody, you know what I mean.

Murray: Specific things.

Tom: But this was... and even the white man was on it. Even the premier himself was on social aid. Relief they called it them days. You remember, the relief. Another thing I was going to tell you. That relief. You know that there was 90% of the Metis people, they called us relief. He says, "Oh, you people lived on relief." But they didn't live on relief. You know what they made them do? In order to get relief, they would put work programs on. We did ask for this, we did ask for this. I'm not blaming, but why we would be crucified even today for that?

Murray: Right.

Tom: When we went to the government and we asked for work programs which they did adopt, you know, through municipalities adopted...

Murray: It was road, road crews and...

Tom: We built roads, we gravelled them. I can go and show you a number of roads and hills that was cut down from these people at ten cents an hour. You see, that's what I got that raise for them, you see. And it was given to them. Like if you worked, say three months in one summer at ten cents an hour, you'd have quite a bit piled up, wouldn't you? A dollar a day them days and that's a lot. So you'd have quite a bit piled up. And in the wintertime, the rate that the provincial government had for relief, you understand, a family of three would receive \$15. I'm just taking figures like that. So then, that's when I got that raise. And then that's when I put myself in wrong, getting this raise, you see.

Murray: During that period then, up to 1937, you were mostly concerned about whether or not you had a claim for land.

Tom: That's right.

Murray: Was there much discussion about things? Like, in some of the meetings I have some papers on, there were two other things that came up pretty regularly and that was education and

relief. Now, you fought about those things too?

Tom: Oh yes, but you see - where did you find that? I'll leave that. I guess it's alright but they should have been just brought up as... I'll tell you what. We set the committee up. What did they call this? A grievance committee. In fact, I sat on this grievance committee for a while. They looked after those issues that had nothing to with the...

Murray: Land issue.

Tom: The land issue.

Murray: They were two separate things?

Tom: It was the land issue which was the worst.

Murray: That was the primary goal.

Tom: And then you'll find later on that the housing did come in there. Like after we had got settled claims, then we would provide houses and everything for those that wanted nothing to do with the land.

Murray: Right, so the first thing to do was to get land.

Tom: Yeah, to get our land so we'll know where we are. You see, now land was all bought up by this time. I mean, all the land was bought up, all the good land was bought up. So we thought, if this land was to be given to us from 1905 up to 1931, that would be what? - a good ten years land there. Well, we didn't get this land so we figured that there was money there instead. So this is when we thought, if it is money instead of our land, and if there is money, then we would go to the housing and schooling and stuff like that, you see.

Murray: So, in terms of getting land, which government did you expect to put pressure on?

Tom: Oh, we had to go to the federal.

Murray: Federal government.

Tom: We had to. But you see, as I tell you, we had no money to go to the federal government.

Murray: Didn't have any money to do research or anything?

Tom: That's why we dealt with the provincial government figuring they would give us a hand and then go to the federal government. But lots of times they wouldn't, you know. They would hang back on what they were going to do for us. But the pressure was on them so much, that's when they finally come out, said, "We'll give you so much money and then you draw up this brief."

Murray: And then take it to the government.

Tom: And then take it to the federal government and further if we have to.

Murray: Right. Did you know at the time when you were trying to get support from the provincial government, that in Alberta, the Metis there had gotten land from the provincial government? Were you aware of that? They had got colonies in Alberta.

Tom: Oh yeah, but this was done in the early 1900s.

Murray: No, this was the same time that you were organizing in. They had a commission of inquiry into conditions of the Metis people in 1935, and then in 1939 and 1940, they set up seven colonies that were....

Tom: Oh yeah, yeah, we got them here too.

Murray: But this was much bigger than in Saskatchewan.

Tom: Was it?

Murray: This was...

Tom: You see, we got what they call the Metis farm.

Murray: At Green Lake.

Tom: No, no, the first one was at Lebret.

Murray: That's right, I remember that.

Tom: But then, you see, this was just a cover-up, you understand. "We put these fellows into this land then they..."

Murray: Then they can't complain any more.

Tom: Then they can't complain any more, you see. Maybe the same thing happened in Alberta, which I didn't know, but it could've happened the same way in Alberta. They put this land out and they put these people and today the government is making a fortune out of these farms.

Murray: Well, not in Alberta.

Tom: They are here.

Murray: Yeah, yeah, probably.

Tom: You take this Metis farm up here. They've got about 500 head of cattle, pure bred cattle, and these guys are living on social aid that's working on there. So the government is making a killing off it. They sent up to Green Lake and they dumped them off in box cars in Green Lake, you know, back in, what?

Murray: 1940 I think.

Tom: 1940, and you heard about that?

Murray: Yeah.

Tom: There is a friend of mine here, he was up there. And they didn't know what to eat. You had to clear your forty acres. But what are you going to eat in the meantime?

Murray: Right.

Tom: See? So they pulled out of there.

Murray: This friend, he's in Regina, is he?

Tom: Oh yeah.

Murray: What's his name?

Tom: Pelletier, Henry Pelletier. He lives 164 Pioneer Village.

Murray: And he used to live where before he went to Green Lake?

Tom: At Lebret.

Murray: Lebret.

Tom: Yeah, Lebret.

Murray: And he was one of the ones that went by train...?

Tom: That went up there. Yeah, yeah.

Murray: When did they establish the farm at Lebret?

Tom: That was about 1937? 1937 I think it was.

Murray: And they gave people acres....?

Tom: They made houses there and then they had a working force on the farm. There wasn't enough land, you see. There was two sections at the time only that they had bought. The provincial government didn't buy this land. But today they are claiming it and there is nobody saying a word about it. The federal government give this land to the Metis people. I'll tell you why this happened...

(End of Side A)

(Side B)

Tom: ...good," he says. "Okay sir." So we come back the next day when he told us, at ten o'clock the next day. "You know,"

he says, "I'll do youse more harm than good," he says, "I could get a lot of votes out of this." He says, "I could get an awful lot of votes but I know your people are hungry. I know that you need this thing," he says.

Murray: Which thing is this that he was...?

Tom: I just forget. Over something about land. But anyway, I always think about this, how he put it. You see, that he wouldn't play politics with it. Now that's pretty honest of him that he wouldn't play politics with us.

Murray: He thought he wouldn't lose.

Tom: On any issue that concerned, like, we weren't that bright. Maybe we went to him and say, "Here now, could you just throw up your arms and get us a piece of bread," or something. But then he was smart enough to know...

Murray: The politics of it.

Tom: The politics part of it that he could have made votes. But he wouldn't do that to hurt us, you see.

Murray: In those days, in the late thirties, was the CCF the best party as far as responding to the Metis do you think?

Tom: They were at that time. Well, as I say, there wasn't too many of them in there, you know. H.H. Williams was one of our best bets. But as I say, he wouldn't hurt you on account of just to play politics. He could've done it.

Murray: What about the other parties?

Tom: The other parties. They were good enough to us, you know. Like, I mean you see, we had enough influence over them. I mean that they said, "Well, we'll do something for you," you know. I mean, they would listen to us. Not that they done anything, but they listened to us. And then when the pressure come on enough, that's when they give us this money for this brief. Because they knew that there was something behind this. They knew that we were not, that we meant business, in other words. That's why they finally gave in to this \$30,000 or \$40,000 or whatever it was at the time. I forget, I think it's \$40,000 isn't it, or...

Murray: Oh, I think they gave \$10,000.

Tom: A little more than that.

Murray: Well, that's what I see in the papers I read.

Tom: Oh, oh, that's what it cost for the brief, but then they give us...

Murray: Well, they had given \$10,000 and they actually only spent \$7,000 for the brief. That's the figures I came across. I don't think they gave more than that did they?

Tom: No, I thought it was in the amount of \$20,000.

Murray: Well, from what I can see...

Tom: Unless somebody else got ahold of it.

Murray: Well, it may be that there was another grant too, but the first grant was \$10,000.

Tom: Yeah, you see the worst part of it was this now. Every time you go to move, there was always somebody in there, trying to get in there and...

Murray: Get something out.

Tom: The politicians and all this were right at you. If you held a convention - like we held one in the King Edward Hotel in Saskatoon.

Murray: What year would that have been?

Tom: That was when I become president. That was about 1938 or 37. I'm not sure of the...

Murray: The year I have you as president is 1941.

Tom: That's when I quit.

Murray: Oh, I see.

Tom: We could follow it up from there. From 1941, 1940 I guess it would be, or 41, I just forget. There should be a power of attorney given to... did you ever find that? That I had to give...

Murray: Because you left the province?

Tom: Because I left the province. I think Ross was then given the power of...

(break in tape)

Murray: I didn't have my tape on for that. Now, could you explain it. You just explained to me that in 1942 you resigned.

Tom: Yeah, I resigned then. I was out of the picture, in other words, in 1942.

Murray: Okay, now maybe we could go back. We talked about this yesterday but maybe we could go back so I could get

it on tape. In 1937 or 1938, you said yesterday, you joined an

organization called a Union for the Unemployed.

Tom: That's right.

Murray: Could you tell me that story?

Tom: That was about 1936 I think when I joined the Union of Unemployed. You see, we weren't getting very far. I was on the grievance committee of the Metis Society then, and we weren't getting nowheres. There was a lot of people that were coming in from different parts of the province saying, "Gosh, we're only living on \$5 a month." Well, you see, they took me a little bit too, but I didn't mind this. They took me. They could see that I was the chairman of this grievance committee so E.B. Mills got a hold of me, Pete Nicholson and...

Murray: These were city politicians were they?

Tom: City politicians. There was Olson and Mayor Ellison at the time and, "Come on, we can do something for you."

Murray: And these were all people in the Union of the Unemployed?

Tom: At the Union of Unemployed. In fact, they were all the president, vice-president, chairman, and secretary and everything. So they got me in there and, by God, I was interested in this thing, you see. And it carried on, you know. Boy, they were doing alright with their organization and everything like that. It looked awful good to me. But then I had to become a Communist to do this see.

Murray: When did you find that out? You had to sign a card did you, or buy membership?

Tom: I have a card. I don't think I've got it now but, no, it was taken. I had to have a card. I went to the Westman Chambers I think at the time. You know where the Westman Chambers are in Regina here? They had a little office in there and I went and got a card. There was two of us that got cards and my president from the Lebret local...

Murray: What was his name?

Tom: Fisher. He's in the old country, right now. That's where he's living, since the war. Well, he comes back for a visit. But he was a member of the Communist party.

Murray: So just the two Metis, as far as you know?

Tom: That's all that I know. That's the only ones that I know.

Murray: Did you know when you signed that card that that's what it was?

Tom: The Communist party?

Murray: Yeah.

Tom: Oh yeah, I wasn't that dumb. But then, I thought at the time, as I told you before, when I went and then when I held this card, then they give me a hand, see, or to organize the province which...

Murray: Into the Union of the Unemployed.

Tom: And I went to Indian Head, I went to Weyburn, Estevan, everything. And they all joined the Union of Unemployed.

Murray: These were Metis people you were organizing?

Tom: Metis people that I was organizing. And Lebret, Tullymet and Ituna, they were all over. Oh gee, we were doing alright. Then it starts coming up, you see. As I said, one time when Mills and I went to Fort Qu'Appelle to the municipal office which was distributing relief for Lebret and all these places, they give a \$10 raise. You see, this is what hurt me, you know.

Murray: It helped you but it hurt you.

Tom: It hurt me. That's right, see, because...

Murray: Tell me how it hurt you.

Tom: Well, like, being I was a Communist, and then when they got a relief through the Communist party, well then the government was scared. They said, "What the heck? We have to be careful here because that Communist will go all over and the first thing we know we got a rebellion." I'll tell you the way it was, see. Louis Riel, like, is a blood relation to me, you know, Louis Riel. See, his grandmother and my grandmother are sisters.

Murray: Right.

Tom: And they were scared I'd be another Louis Riel. You didn't have a letter in there anywheres, eh? There was two of them got at me then. See, there was two of these fellows got at me. A fellow by the name of - what do you call the fellow at the Fort that used to be the Pioneer at the Pioneer store? He was a big shot in Fort Qu'Appelle.

Murray: A white man, eh?

Tom: He was a white man and...

Murray: These guys were attacking you as being a Communist?

Tom: They were attacking me as a rebel, you understand. And 'the barefoot boy', the way they put it in the Leader-Post, "the barefoot boy is going to lead the Metis people into

another rebellion."

Murray: And that would have been in 1936 or 37, eh?

Tom: About 1937, yeah. I would say about 1937, yeah. Yeah, it was right in the Leader-Post. I had a clipping of it, it was taken away.

Murray: This was when these guys attacked you for being a Communist.

Tom: Yeah, and then there was another one from Regina here. What the devil was his name?

Murray: But a business man or something, eh?

Tom: He was a business man and quite a writer and also kind of a politician. You see, they both had letters in there.

Murray: And did they mention the fact that you were a member of the Communist party?

Tom: No, they didn't.

Murray: They didn't know that then?

Tom: They didn't know at the time that I was.

Murray: But they knew you were...

Tom: But they knew that I was mixed up with them because they could get the records, wherever we went. Like, we went to North Battleford, Mills and I, and we spoke to the municipal part of it there, see, the heads of it, the reeve and the councillors. We spoke to them which give them another raise of a dollar or two dollars, whatever it was. Whenever we went, we got it. And then they said, "Now, he's going to rebel pretty soon. If he gets all this social aid, what's he going to do later on?" But it didn't hurt me as far as the Metis Society is concerned because they knew what I was up to.

Murray: What you were really doing, eh?

Tom: Yeah.

Murray: But it hurt you in the eyes of white people.

Tom: It hurt me in the eyes of the white people. That's why they raided my house. When they had a chance to raid it, then they really raided it.

Murray: Could you tell that story? What year was that that they raided your house?

Tom: 1941.

Murray: This was while you were in the army?

Tom: That's while I was stationed in Winnipeg. And at the time, I was in Winnipeg. Well, I was a way up north there, recruiting, as I said. I was on a recruiting team, you see. And this is what happened while I was away. And then the time I got a leave, after I come back from Winnipeg, it was a whole month this had happened and there was nothing I could trace and I only had a few days leave. By the time I got discharged in the fall of 1941, there was no way I could trace anything.

Murray: Nobody would even admit it happened, I suppose.

Tom: No, no, no.

Murray: You went to the RCMP?

Tom: No. Well, I went to the Fort Qu'Appelle RCMP but he had been transferred, the guy that had done it. No, no. That's right, he told me that he heard about this raid but it was two Mounties from Regina that had done it. He wasn't in it. He told me. At least that's what he told me. He says, "I told them where you lived," he says. But he says, "Tom," he says,

"I wasn't in the raid at all." But he wouldn't give me the name of the two Mounties, you see, that had raided it.

Murray: But he knew the names?

Tom: But he knew the names, yeah. See then, they wanted to know how far I would get, I guess. And then right after that raid, you see, it was in July I think it was when they raided my house, June or July, I just forget. July I guess it was when they raided in there. Then in December I got discharged. And I was just going to show you something. Now, why did they give me all this stuff when they discharged me, see? Now, they had no way of knowing, I suppose, they had no excuses to make why they were discharging me. But then they finally... It wasn't very well written but that was the only thing they give me when they let me go. Isn't that awful? I went to these people and they said they didn't know who I was or anything. That was the National Defense.

Murray: So you got nothing out of it?

Tom: I got nothing out of it, see.

Murray: And they told you you were being discharged because you were sick?

Tom: Because I was sick.

Murray: But you weren't sick.

Tom: And I wasn't sick.

Murray: It was because you were a member of the Communist party.

Tom: Of the Communist party is what, I believe it. Here it is. Category E, a six inch scar on the right, that is right here. Which I did have appendicitis, and they knew that when I enlisted.

Murray: Sure.

Tom: But it's still Category E which was the lowest. You see, then they changed it into different numbers. But this was the lowest category you could get in any man's army at the time.

Murray: So you enlisted but then all of a sudden you didn't meet the requirements?

Tom: Yeah. Yeah.

Murray: That was eight months later.

Tom: I was an "A" man. It tells you here doesn't it. It tells you right here, see, private enlisted in South Saskatchewan, he served in Canada. Military physical standard, Category E is what they discharged me on. That was the lowest category, if somebody would have two (inaudible) on me, couldn't have got any lower than that. At the time. Then they started giving different points after that. But this, at that time. Now you see, so...

Murray: So they weren't worried about you as a member of the Metis Society?

Tom: No, no. No, no. They were afraid that I would lead the Metis into a, what you call them, I said before?

Murray: Rebellion or something?

Tom: A rebellion or something, yeah. Because they knew that, you know, what the devil is that old guy's name at the Fort there? He run that store for years and years in there. The Pioneers. He started with the Hudson's Bay and then he worked into the Pioneer and he knew. He knew it was...

Murray: That story was in the Leader-Post.

Tom: Yeah. See, D.H. MacDonald had dropped the Metis people a blind there, D.H. MacDonald? He robbed them poor people blind and this guy knew that if there was ever a rebellion, they were afraid I would lead it back to that, see.

Murray: MacDonald was the one who ran the store?

Tom: He used to run a bank, you know.

Murray: Oh, a bank. Right.

Tom: Doggone, if I... I'll tell you what...

Murray: You might remember it later on.

Tom: Yeah, it will come to me. It will come to me, yeah. It always does. I always think about it and then I...

Murray: One of the questions I wanted to ask you was when you were organizing in Regina and North Battleford and when you went to all these places, were the Metis people hard to organize? Did they resist the idea of an organization?

Tom: No. You see, it took us a little while to explain to them what we were doing. We said now, we don't want the church to get mixed up in it, we don't want the government, let us do this on our own. We really got a response because, what is it? 2800 isn't it that we had?

Murray: You said in 1940, eh?

Tom: Yeah. And that was all that, you know, that there was. Some of them that I said, "Look, dig into it. Dig into it and..."

Murray: And find as many as you can.

Tom: And find as many as you can. They couldn't at that time. Now if you put a barrier there in 1940, now today you can get 20,000 because there is new Metis.

Murray: Right. Every time a Metis marries a white person, there is another Metis.

Tom: See, all these people come from the old country now. Now they are shacking up and marrying Indian women and naturally, there is a halfbreed coming every day.

Murray: So there is old halfbreeds making halfbreeds and new halfbreeds making halfbreeds.

Tom: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Murray: I know that in reading some letters and talking to some Metis people, that one of the problems that they had in organizing was that there was a lot of jealousy and suspicion among the Metis people. Was that true, do you remember?

Tom: No, no. I don't think it was. The only trouble we had was the financial part of it. No, no, if you went to the people and explained to them what you were trying to do, that little ten cents would come out, "I'll be a member," you know. Even the older people understood this. Younger ones understood that. No, I wouldn't say that...

Murray: That wasn't a problem?

Tom: That was no problem whatever. The only thing is when you called... at that time we had to call only general meetings, you understand. And travelling, they couldn't come because they...

Murray: Couldn't afford it.

Tom: We couldn't afford it.

Murray: Right. In the locals that you organized in the mid-thirties, 1935 to 1936/37, did each local have an executive, a president and...?

Tom: Yeah, they did. They had their own, every one of them.

Murray: Their own organizations.

Tom: There was, as I would say, at that time that there was about 35-40 locals and they all had their president, vice-president, secretary and executives, yeah. Yeah, they had grievance committees that would look after the people, social committees and all this.

Murray: Were there that many locals? I know that in one of the documents I have, it says in 1939 there were 16 locals only.

Tom: In 1939, 16 locals. No, they are out. I would say there was 27 or 30 at that time. 1939, you say? 1939, no, there must have been more than that. Oh yeah, well I could name them to you, pretty near, now. There was Estevan, there was Yorkton, there was North Battleford, Saskatoon, Prince Albert. Baljennie was one and Swift Current, Maple Creek and there was Regina here, Lebret, Fort Qu'Appelle, Tullymet...

Murray: Lestock?

Tom: Torquay, Indian Head, Lestock, oh gosh. They were all in there 1939. They were all in there. And then there was Rocanville with the Haydens and the Pritchards. Did you know them?

Murray: Ah...

Tom: They must be all dead, them old people though. Haydens were good.

Murray: Right. Would there be any locals north of the line running through North Battleford and Prince Albert? Were there those?

Tom: Oh yes, there was. Kinistino, I think it was Kinistino. Well, of course Prince Albert is north of that. There was a

local in...

Murray: Would there be any as far north as Buffalo Narrows or Green Lake?

Tom: Ah, yes there was. One, that's where Cromarty was from. Away up in...

Murray: Cromarty, eh?

Tom: What?

Murray: Cromarty, was that his name?

Tom: Cromarty, I thought it was. Harry Cromarty. He come from way up in Buffalo Narrows. Yeah.

Murray: Were there any from Cumberland House? Do you remember?

Tom: Cumberland House. No, no, the closest we were up in that northeast country was Hudson Bay Junction. Yeah, that's the closest we went. See, Cumberland House was being, I think it

was going out by that time and I think most of them people had come out of there. The Metis had come out of there.

Murray: There were treaty Indians there?

Tom: There were treaty Indians there, yeah. So that's why we didn't go in there.

Murray: Were there annual conventions every year before 1937, 1935?

Tom: Oh gosh, yes. Well, there weren't no, I told you that...

Murray: They were just general meetings?

Tom: General meetings because we couldn't call them a convention at the time. We had nothing...

Murray: You had no constitution or...

Tom: But no constitution to go by, see.

Murray: But you still elected an executive?

Tom: Oh yes, we had a very strong executive from all over the province.

Murray: Was it the same president all along in those, before 1937?

Tom: Oh, no, no, no.

Murray: Who were the presidents?

Tom: J.Z. La Rocque was president, Ross as I told you was...

Murray: The first president.

Tom: And then there was, I think Knutson was there for a while and...

Murray: So they changed quite a bit, eh?

Tom: Oh yes, oh yes. You see, the wish of the people. We give them a free vote.

Murray: Democratic.

Tom: Now, you would speak up there and say what you think of it and everything. We pretty near all had the same speeches because we were after the same thing. It wasn't like a political speech. But then they would say, well, we want this gentleman. So, that's the one they would vote in, you see.

Murray: So there wasn't much disagreement about the goals of the organization. Everybody wanted the same thing? Is that right or was there a debate about, was there any disagreement about...?

Tom: Oh yeah. Oh, there was an awful lot of disagreement about different things. But then you see, I told them. I used to tell them, you know, I was glad to get you to be against me, her to be against what I said. You understand what I mean? Then from the three of us, we found something there, you see.

Murray: Where did some of the disagreement come? Can you remember?

Tom: Well, it was just minor things like this guy is going to be president because he's going to give us a million dollars and so on. Just by the things like that, you see. And this was good. It was good for the party. A lot of things that they brought out maybe about land claims, how they were going to be dealt with. And then of course, mind you, one guy would say that he could bring these land claims right away. Maybe some politician had told him this, I don't know.

Murray: Right.

Tom: But he would make a great big speech saying that he could get these land claims right away if he was elected. Well, we knew for a fact that he couldn't do that. But you see, he must have got pushed ahead from somebody see, in order to say these things. But from there, we picked up an awful lot of things, mind you. We did pick up a lot of things.

Murray: You learned through that.

Tom: Yeah. Then finally, we got our constitution set up, you

see.

Murray: Right. One of the things you mentioned yesterday was, the Halfbreed Organization, which is what it was called up to 1933, was just for Metis. Could you talk a bit about that?

Tom: Just for Metis, yeah. Because you see, our land claims, the ones we thought we could claim, our scrips was altogether different to the Indian. You understand?

Murray: Whether he was status or non-status?

Tom: As I see, at that time there was no, I never heard of a non-status. You know what a non-status is, eh?

Murray: Someone who has left his treaty.

Tom: That's all it is.

Murray: Yeah.

Tom: And them same guys, if there was \$1000 there, they'd go back and get it. They are still in the treaty. Well, I would say 90% of them....

Murray: Unless they married a woman who was not treaty, then they wouldn't have their treaty rights anymore, I guess, eh. If a man married a...

Tom: No, they still would get it.

Murray: They do, eh?

Tom: It was the biggest...

Murray: I mean, they weren't supposed to...

Tom: That is the biggest thing that John Diefenbaker done when he give them like, they could get out, they could buy themselves out of the reserve. You understand what I mean?

Murray: How much did it cost to buy out?

Tom: Eh?

Murray: How much did it cost to buy out?

Tom: Well, it all depends how many kids you have. See, it would go up to about \$5000 they would give an Indian to get out of the reserve. You understand, because freedom of speech, freedom of rights.

Murray: Right. You could vote...

Tom: I know a guy right here in the city of Regina, he's still

living, that's gone back three times and he got \$5000 every time. Finally they said, "Oh, this has got to be a racket." You see, the government themselves started, they put it in and then the Indian made a racket out of it. They finally had to close him down. You see.

Murray: So in the thirties, the Indians weren't leaving the reserve, eh?

Tom: Oh no, no, no. Not till about, I would say about 1945 or 1946.

Murray: After the war?

Tom: After the war. Then they start. Even then they didn't, they were shy about coming to Regina or anywhere.

Murray: Did they start coming out after then partly because they had been in the war and they learned a bit more about...?

Tom: That's right. They learned more about life then. That's true. Then they come out and the work was starting to... Saskatchewan was booming, then they started coming out, you see. Now, there was a couple of Indians joined this one time. Well, they didn't join us but they come there at a general meeting. A fellow by the name of Deschambault which was an Indian and then there was Smoky Johnson. What was his name, Smoky? Johnson was his name, wasn't it?

Third Person: Yeah.

Tom: Well, anyway, he was in Regina all his life. I think he come from Medicine Hat, you were saying. Anyway, he was in there but then he found out that he was an Indian, you understand, a full blooded Indian. So he told us straight out; he was good enough to tell us. He said, "What you're after has nothing to do with us. So I couldn't join you. I mean, what if I was to spend a couple of thousand dollars. It wouldn't do me any good if you got your land claims."

Murray: Right.

Tom: You understand what I mean? So, the Indian didn't really bother with us. They were glad that we were, I guess...

Murray: They supported you but they didn't...

Tom: They supported but they weren't... because they knew that our struggles were different to theirs, you see.

Murray: So that wasn't really a problem in the thirties and forties?

Tom: There was no problem there whatever. No problem whatever, no.

Murray: But it was a policy...

Tom: They come out, they said here. They had to bring everything, their birth certificate, and then we screened it from there, you see, which we had no trouble with any of them to tell you the truth. And then this Johnson, he admitted what he was and he says, "I'll give you all the hand I could do but I'll be an associate member," he called himself. We didn't have the clause in, but at that time he says, "I'll be an associate member just to give you a hand." And he was a pretty well-educated guy. A good speaker.

Murray: Right. So it didn't cause any hard feelings.

Tom: It didn't cause no hard feelings, whatever. Nothing whatever, no, nothing whatever. That I know of, mind you.

Murray: Who would you say were worse off in economic terms in the thirties and early forties, the Indian or the Metis?

Tom: Oh the Metis.

Murray: Got the worst of it.

Tom: The Metis, I think, was the worst off of the bunch.

Murray: Were a lot of Metis people living on road allowances and that sort of thing in the south?

Tom: No, that's a lot of baloney. They had their little lands you know, here and there. But I would say 90% were living... but then you see, we got the same treatment as the white man as far as...

Murray: The government was concerned.

Tom: The government was concerned. We have to because, like, to take a fellow like Ellison. One time the Premier, W.J. Patterson was speaking and he slipped and said something about we were Metis and we were different to other people. Then he got up at this convention and says, "I cannot understand, Mr. Premier," he says, "for saying... I meet these people on the street and I couldn't tell a lot of them from my own people in the city of Regina," he says. So how could he separate us, you see what I mean?

Murray: Was he a CCFer, the Mayor Ellison?

Tom: He was a Communist.

Murray: Communist, right.

Tom: He become a CCF after that. But then, it's really the Communist is what he was. You see, this doggone Olson, you know, he was a crooked son of a gun. He was an alderman here.

Murray: Right.

Tom: Yeah.

Murray: Did the Communist party take any interest in the Metis people?

Tom: No, no, they were very careful about that. They were very careful. They never showed up. They got it to me and that was it, you see. They figured that, see, I was on different committees, and they knew this through their, I suppose they'd ask this guy, "How is Major in there?"

Murray: You were on different committees with the Metis committees.

Tom: Yeah, yeah, different committees.

Murray: So they thought you would be an influential person?

Tom: They figured I would be the best, yeah.

Murray: Do you think that they were trying to use you?

Tom: I believe they were. Yes, they were. I'll have to agree with you that they were trying to use me.

Murray: But some of them, you think, were sincere as well in trying to help people?

Tom: Oh yes, there was some of them, yeah. I think Mayor Ellison was a very sincere man. I very honestly think that he was. But the other ones. And old Pete Nicholson, I'm sure of it. I'd like to go and talk to old Pete just...

Murray: He's still around, eh?

Tom: Oh yeah, mind you, the last three years, I haven't seen him. But I think Pete was just a Communist too in order to get something for the people of Regina, not the province. He wasn't worried about the province. But he was worried about the city of Regina, see. That's why Pete, I'm pretty sure Pete wasn't a true Communist. But E.V. Mills, and a fellow by the name of Broderick, and Olson and all these fellows, they were true Communists; there was no getting away from it. Yeah.

Murray: Do you remember an organization called the Dominion Independent Progressive Association?

Tom: No.

Murray: It was supposed to be a Metis organization but I don't think it really was.

Tom: Progressive, no. No.

Murray: It was called Dominion...

Tom: Unless, where was it held, do you know?

Murray: Well, there was some - the only time I ever heard of it was in Edmonton in 1940.

Tom: Oh, well, maybe in Alberta.

(End of Side B, Tape IH-395)

(Side A, Tape IH-395A)

Tom: They would talk over there but then when they come to you, oh, they were with you. You understand what I mean? You'd run into that, I don't care what organization you belonged to.

Murray: Opportunists, yeah.

Tom: Yeah, yeah. So there I couldn't say but I never heard of them, I'm sure of that.

Murray: When did Zacharias Hamilton first get involved with the Society?

Tom: He come in there about 1934. He was pushing things ahead. Oh, he was 100% behind us. And at the same time, he was stabbing you from the back, see.

Murray: Describe that part of it. How did you know he was doing that?

Tom: Well, because you see, like at one meeting. This had all come out on this Communist stuff. Now he didn't want to see me in there, old Zach Hamilton.

Murray: He was a Liberal wasn't he?

Tom: Nobody knows what he was. He worked for both parties, if there was a dollar in it. He was really nobody. Now the time I got elected was in Saskatoon at the convention, back in 1938 I think it was. In 1938 when Vandale...

Murray: Maybe Vandale resigned did he and then you...?

Tom: No, no. In the vote, Vandale lost to me.

Murray: Right.

Tom: In the vote. He didn't resign. Vandale didn't resign. But we had our annual meetings you know, for president, vice-president and all this, see. Vandale was still president and then I took over from him at the convention in Saskatoon.

Murray: Right.

Tom: And this is when I knew that these fellows were after me then. Here was my cousin here, first cousin, Klein, I was telling you about. Klein and his wife and my sister, they all come to the what do you call. They had no credentials to come to this convention, see. There was three from every local to attend the convention.

Murray: They had to have official credentials?

Tom: And they had to have official credentials. But who walks in but one of my sisters, Klein's wife and himself. And there

was different ones from all over and there was an official party from Willowbunch. There was an official party. There was three of them elected to come there. There was three others showed up at this convention. And this old fellow says to me, old McGillis says to me, he says, "How did they get here? Where did they get the money?" "Well," I says, "Maybe they found it somewhere." He says, "I don't think so." And Klein here was driving a brand new car, see, which belonged to the government. And here, we're at the King Edwards Hotel. I was up on the top floor, the cheapest room there was. There was my delegation from Lebret. And there was Fort Qu'Appelle in there, there was Tullymet and there was Indian Head and oh, all over, North Battleford. But three...

Murray: From each place.

Tom: Yeah. Anyway, the first thing I know, old Zach Hamilton's got a room in there.

Murray: He wasn't invited to the convention?

Tom: No, no, not at all. Wilma, she had a place in there.

Murray: That was his wife?

Tom: No, no, Wilma...

Murray: Oh, Moore.

Tom: Moore, right. She had a corner in there, in the hotel, with a few drinks and stuff like that.

Murray: Were she and Hamilton together?

Tom: No, no, Hamilton was in a different corner. They were all fighting for something else, see. And then I thought, what the devil is going on? And then this old McGillis was a smart old jigger, you know, from south.

Murray: He was a Metis?

Tom: He was a Metis, yeah. He was a delegate from Willowbunch. He says to me, "There is something going on here." And then he knew this fellow, he was an insurance man.

He was a very well-educated young fellow, a Metis from Gravelbourg. He knew him real good. Labossiere was his name. And very crooked, very crooked. He worked for the Liberal government. He was in there with a room in there, in the King Edwards and he had drinks, you see. They would give him a drink and...

Murray: You invite the Metis in and give them a drink.

Tom: This guy, yeah.

Murray: They were trying to arrange who to vote for?

Tom: Yeah, yeah. This was all going on in there and then this old McGillis opened my eyes and I thought well, by God, this is going on. So I sent one of my men, this Fisher guy that he was always there, you see. I sent him in there to find out what was going on. "You talk to him and pick up what they are. I want to know this." There was no way they were going to talk to me.

Murray: Right. You had to send someone else in.

Tom: Yeah, so I sent Fisher in there and another guy who was working for me, a fellow from... well Harry got around. See, Harry was a very good-natured devil. Harry Cromarty.

Murray: Oh yeah, he was from up north.

Tom: Yeah. And he says, "Tommy, I'll find out what's going on." So anyway, they went around and they dug up everything. Now this was only against me. All these fellows that come in there.

Murray: They didn't want anybody to vote for you?

Tom: To vote for me.

Murray: Who were they trying to get people to vote for?

Tom: Vandale was one of them and then there was, I forget who it was, there was three of us anyway. I wasn't even in it. I wasn't even interested to become that. I wasn't interested no more than the man in the moon was.

Murray: But they thought you were?

Tom: They thought that I was, see. Well, anyway, we had the last day of it, you know, in the morning. Then they would nominate the president, secretary, and everything and then they were to vote on them that afternoon.

Murray: Before you go any further, was Wilma Moore and Hamilton trying to get people to vote against you or just...?

Tom: Yeah. Yeah.

Murray: For different reasons.

Tom: Because she, I wouldn't give any satisfaction to Wilma Moore. I wouldn't give her no satisfaction at all. She invited me for supper that week. I had supper with her and everything.

Murray: What was she after?

Tom: Well, as I told you before, she was quite a lawyer, see. She was a, for a fact, she was a dean, wasn't she?

Murray: She was a teacher anyway.

Tom: I think she was a dean.

Murray: Maybe she was.

Tom: Well, she wanted to do was to go to Privy Council and...

Murray: To be appointed to the Privy Council.

Tom: Huh? Yeah. Appointed to them. And she thought if the organization was strong enough that we could put her in there.

Murray: But when you wouldn't cooperate...

Tom: And I wouldn't cooperate. Then she went after somebody else.

Murray: Well, who was her best man?

Tom: Vandale. Vandale was her man.

Murray: Who was Hamilton's man?

Tom: Hamilton's man was Klein, here, my next-door neighbour, which is my first cousin.

Murray: Now, there was another lawyer.

Tom: And my sister was getting paid to come and vote against, which they thought that I was after, which I wasn't, to tell you the truth.

Murray: So they were fighting someone who wasn't fighting?

Tom: That wasn't even fighting for it. So anyway, I guess Cromarty went around you know, he was talking to this fellow, different delegates, you know, and he explained to them exactly where I stood. He said, "That man is not trying to run." So old McGillis says, "We'll make him run," you know. By golly, then in the morning about ten o'clock the nominations were open for president. And I was sitting here, I hadn't the slightest idea what was going on, see. By golly, they put my name up. Okay, then there was Vandale was up and then there was

Labossiere from Gravelbourg was, like, Hamilton's man because that's his wife's cousin, you see. And he could get everything. Anyway, everything was okay. We had dinner, we

had lunch. We talked at lunch and then after dinner it dragged on till about five o'clock when all nominations were in. And my name was in there, Labossiere's name and Vandale's, you see. And I thought, "Who in the devil is going to vote for me?" And I told Fisher that. He says, "You'd better prepare a speech," he says. I thought no way that I'm going to prepare anything. I says, "I'm not even going to be in there." Then there was fellows from Fort Qu'Appelle and everything so by golly...

Murray: So they ended up electing you? They ended up voting for you?

Tom: Every one of them. You know that I, there was only about ten difference. They had each four or five and I had the majority, the rest of the delegates.

Murray: You mentioned the young Metis lawyer who was working for the Liberals. Who was his man? What was he after?

Tom: Which one was that?

Murray: Well, you mentioned there was a young Metis fellow from Regina who you thought was crooked. He was working for the Liberal government. He had a room in that hotel too, you said.

Tom: Oh, that's that Labossiere guy.

Murray: Oh I see, he was the one who ran?

Tom: Yeah, yeah. Old Zach tried to run him, see. This McGillis knew so good that he went around and...

Murray: And told everybody what was going on.

Tom: What he wants. So then that put him out. And then Vandale had Saskatoon and that's all. Because they knew him north of there, which I didn't know, and I liked Vandale. I liked Mike, you know.

Murray: But he was being used was he?

Tom: Yeah, he was being used.

Murray: And he was being used by Wilma Moore?

Tom: Yeah. And I stuck to my guns when I went up there. Three times the ballot went over that I wouldn't accept it. Three times it come back that I had to. Finally, I told them, I says, "Okay, now if it's strong enough," I says, "I'll take it. Otherwise," I says, "I am not pushing no way or another." And then we made our acceptance speeches. I mean, before,

yeah, the acceptance. And I told them right there and then, that's when I seen these guys start coming in then, old Zach showed up, Walter Dawson showed up from the relief department them days. Walter, he was bringing food to these people to vote against me, see. He was working for the provincial government. He was director of social services in the city of Regina. W.W. Dawson. And I could see them all falling in there. And I told them, I said, "There is no way," I says, "I'm going to get elected, I want anybody to come and tell me what to do. That is, outside of the Metis organization. I

want you people to tell me what I stand for, what I'm going to have to do. I want guidance from you people alone. Not from them people standing at the doorway." I told them, you know. Boy, there was a cheer come up and I...

Murray: How many people were at that meeting?

Tom: Three, ten, thirty, I would say about... well there should have been only about sixty, seventy delegates.

Murray: But there were all these other people?

Tom: But there was all these other ones that they were pushing in there.

Murray: Did it turn out that they had been paid to come?

Tom: Oh yeah, oh yeah. They've got even a file here.

Murray: By Hamilton?

Tom: The government and Dawson and all them, they were...

Murray: Was Hamilton the one behind that?

Tom: Oh yeah, Hamilton was behind that.

Murray: Did you ever find that out for sure? Did people tell you that?

Tom: Oh yeah, oh yeah, they finally found out why Hamilton was over there. Why was he over there to start with, see?

Murray: Because he wasn't invited.

Tom: He wasn't even invited. And he was there but for the government at the time, which was the Liberal government. Yeah.

Murray: You mentioned yesterday that you thought Hamilton was just trying to get votes for the Liberal party?

Tom: That's true.

Murray: What evidence did you have of that?

Tom: Oh, well, because the way he went at it, you see. The minute that we were having a meeting, he always had somebody in there working for him and then he would take the minutes of this meeting to Hamilton and Hamilton would take it over to the government, you see. That's why we were very careful never to really mention the government in anything that we were doing because we didn't want anybody to go ahead and use that on us, you see.

Murray: Right. Did he ever try and encourage people to vote for the Liberals?

Tom: Oh yes, oh yes.

Murray: At meetings, eh?

Tom: Oh yes. He never tried it on me, but I know that he tried it. He went down to Lebret and Fort Qu'Appelle just before one election. He went out there and he tried to get votes...

Murray: Liberal votes?

Tom: Yeah. Oh yeah, he tried it alright. There was no getting away from him.

Murray: Now, according to the documents I have, Hamilton and a fellow by the name of Hunter did a lot of work on sort of investigating the Metis claim.

Tom: Hunter?

Murray: Hamilton was with the Saskatchewan Historical Society.

Tom: That's right.

Murray: Now, they did quite a bit of research, they claim, into the Metis claim saying that they had a claim against the federal government. Do you remember that?

Tom: Well, if he did he never mentioned it to us which would have been a very great thing, wouldn't it.

Murray: Well, in 1939 when the Metis Society met with Patterson, Hamilton was there as well and...

Tom: It was (inaudible) I remember that, yeah.

Murray: In fact, he did most of the talking or a lot of the talking anyway.

Tom: Gosh, I don't think he did.

Murray: No? Well, I have the minutes of that meeting. They are in the archives, too.

Tom: Oh yes, that's right. That's right. He did say, but you

see he, you know...

Murray: He knew Patterson.

Tom: Yeah, yeah. It was nothing. Like J.Z., you know, La Rocque, he was quite a politician, J.Z. But you could keep him down in line, you know what I mean. You could..

Murray: You could intimidate him?

Tom: Yeah. And he got up, maybe in that same meeting, he got up and how he liked the scrip. When the last scrip was given, he was entitled to one of them. "That's how I got my education and everything," he said. See, but he wasn't favoring us, he was favoring the Liberal government. That was La Rocque.

Murray: Joe La Rocque. Yeah.

Tom: Yeah, Joe La Rocque. That's what he was favoring. He didn't give a shit about anybody else, see.

Murray: Now, you and Joe Ross knew what was going on about that?

Tom: Oh yeah, yeah, but you see, there was nothing we could do to stop and say, "Now get out of our sight and leave us alone."

Murray: Because they had memberships just like you and...

Tom: No, they didn't.

Murray: They weren't...?

Tom: They weren't. Well, La Rocque was.

Murray: La Rocque was.

Tom: Oh yes, La Rocque was. But he was complaining, you couldn't do a thing about it. But not Hamilton see. But Hamilton would sneak in behind, like he knew these, and then old McGillis would tell me about it. He says, "That Hamilton, I don't like him." You know, they knew him because his wife come from along Willowbunch, see.

Murray: What was her name, do you remember?

Tom: I thought her name was Beaudry, she was a Miss Beaudry. I'm not quite sure on that but I think she was. She worked with him in his office.

Murray: So Hamilton was able to influence a lot of the Metis then?

Tom: Oh yeah, he did, he did, yeah. But you see, not as far as land claims. He would mention that on the odd word but what he was after was strictly a vote for the Liberal government. You see, mind you, he would word it very good. When you were

sitting there, it sounded very... that's like he was one of you. But all the time, he was looking for a vote, you see.

Murray: Right.

Tom: Yeah. That's why I never used that. Now, in 1942 when I resigned, 1941 - I didn't officially resign until 1942 - but in 1941 then when I was in the army, then I give them the power of attorney because they wouldn't let me go. And then in 1942, that's when I really went because I was going into politics and I wasn't going to hurt these people. No way that I would...

Murray: You were identified with politics.

Tom: That's right. That's right. So I went in as a CCF. I was on a committee and everything like that.

Murray: And that's why you quit the Metis Society, because you were active with the CCF?

Tom: Yeah.

Murray: So you campaigned for the CCF in the 1944 election, did you?

Tom: I did, I did. I campaigned for them for a couple of years there. After I was thrown out of the army, I thought I had a very poor deal and I was working off and on, here and there and then I was campaigning.

Murray: So after 1942, you didn't really have anything to do with the Metis Society, or did you?

Tom: Ah, no. No, they wanted me to come back then, 1950. They called two meetings. They called me. They phoned and they wrote me a letter that they wanted to see me. There

was quite a number of them. Maybe that's when I should have went back.

Murray: Do you have those letters do you think?

Tom: No, no. No way you see, because we've been moving around so much that you lose track of everything.

Murray: Right. Threw them out then, yeah.

Tom: Yeah. I'm lucky to have my old discharge papers there. But anyway, they wanted me to start up again. It wasn't functioning, it wasn't working, to tell you the truth. There was a fellow by the name of Norman Parisienne had it and all this and it wasn't working.

Murray: So there was a lot of division in this Society?

Tom: That's when Joe then took over a couple of years after.

Murray: Joe Amyotte?

Tom: Amyotte, you see.

Murray: Was that in the 1950s then?

Tom: Well, later on but...

Murray: In the sixties, yeah.

Tom: When it wasn't functioning and they wanted me, it was about 1950.

Murray: Was that the last you heard of it then, for the fifties?

Tom: No, I heard, but that's the last I had anything to do with it, you understand.

Murray: Right. They asked you to come back?

Tom: Yeah. They wanted me to come back and organize it the way it was before the what do you call it.

Murray: Because it was dead in 1950, I suppose.

Tom: Yes.

Murray: And they wanted to start up again.

Tom: Yes, it was, you know, it was dying in other words, and that's when they wanted me to go back.

Murray: Had there been any provincial conventions in 1949 or 1950?

Tom: Yes, there was a few of them I think in between there. Yeah, there was. But they just couldn't get nowhere with it.

Murray: They didn't have the leadership I guess eh, was that...?

Tom: They didn't have that, that's true. I hate to say this but... and then I should have really went back there. Today maybe we'd have been better off than we are now because politics got into it since then and non-status come in and then they had these riots too which, to tell you the truth, we tried to prevent as much radical as we can, you see. That I was a little bit radical at times but I never did use that in any of our....

Murray: As a strategy or anything.

Tom: Yes. Never, never did I ever try to use that. But mind you, a lot of times, I was mad but I kept that to myself. So, that was my last time there. It was...

Murray: 1950, I guess.

Tom: 1950. That was about July, 1950.

Murray: You mentioned that you campaigned for the CCF. Did you get paid by them to work or was it just on your own?

Tom: No, no, I got paid to do it.

Murray: To organize, eh.

Tom: Yeah.

Murray: And you were paid specifically to organize among the Metis people or just everybody?

Tom: No, no, no.

Murray: Everybody.

Tom: No, I told them straight that I would not have anything to do with the Metis people at all. I says, "I will talk to them the same as I would talk to a white man." Yeah.

Murray: But you weren't going to be sent in secretly or anything?

Tom: No way, no way. And this was well understood.

Murray: And the Metis people understood that too.

Tom: Shumiatcher was in there then as a consultant to the...

Murray: To the cabinet.

Tom: For the CCF.

Murray: Right.

Tom: And he'll tell you. I told him, I says, "There's no way that I'm going to go out there," I says, "and organize anything other than...."

Murray: Was it Shumiatcher who had hired you?

Tom: No, but I know he was hired along with me, like.

Murray: Right.

Tom: He was a consultant in other words. Like, he wrote out, didn't he, the, what do they call this, the...

Murray: Well, he used to chair the meetings with the Metis and the Indians and things too.

Tom: Later on maybe. I think so. But I mean that's the time he wrote - what did you call it, for the CCF, the program like?

Murray: Oh yeah, the policies and the platforms?

Tom: Their constitution in other words. He was the...

Murray: He was a lawyer, yeah.

Tom: Yeah, yeah. He was the lawyer.

Murray: But you knew him, eh?

Tom: Oh, I knew him real good, yeah.

Murray: What, was he...?

Tom: I haven't had nothing to do with him since but I knew him at the time.

Murray: Was he a good man?

Tom: He was a darn good lawyer and at his job he was very good. And then he went out to a couple of meetings with me. We attended but these,...

Murray: These were CCF meetings.

Tom: I strictly stuck to the white people. Really, the odd one, I would talk to the Metis people, the odd one. And then I worked Melville constituency, which included North Qu'Appelle they used to call it at the time. That was Lipton, Fort San and through there, you see.

Murray: Right. Did Joe Ross ever work for the CCF?

Tom: No, but he was quite a supporter. He would talk on the ways.

Murray: Just on his own.

Tom: Just on his own, yeah, yeah. No, he was a great supporter of the CCF but he was never...

Murray: Were there any other Metis leaders who were CCF supporters besides you and Joe?

Tom: Oh yeah, there was. Oh yeah, there was a lot of them. For a fact, they were all out working for them and I think Knutson was a paid...

Murray: Now Joe La Rocque was a Liberal though, wasn't he?

Tom: Oh yeah, he was a very strong Liberal.

Murray: What about St. Denis?

Tom: I don't know that old man that good. He was in Prince Albert.

Murray: Well, yeah, he was...

Tom: I think Wilma... he could have been a Conservative.

Murray: What was Wilma in her politics?

Tom: She was a Conservative.

Murray: Because she was a member of the Liberal party too, at one time.

Tom: Was she? Well, she told me she was a member of the Progressive, or, at that time straight Conservative.

Murray: Is that right? I remember somewhere it was said that Joe Ross told the CCF that at one of the meetings she had passed out Conservative literature. Do you remember that?

Tom: Yes. That's true. That's what I'm saying, that she was a Conservative. And you say she was...?

Murray: Well, some of the old Liberals in Saskatoon claim she was a Liberal, so maybe she was. Maybe she left one party and joined the other, you know.

Tom: You see, I worked the Melville constituency. I'm well known in there. I can still go back there and talk to a lot of them old guys. Then I got a job with the government. After they were elected, I started to work for the government. I got a job at the fish hatchery in Fort Qu'Appelle. And it so happened one day, I dropped into Balcarres, it was just before election. I wasn't interested in it, you know, really. "Here he is. Must be election coming on," you know, stuff like that. They seen me coming. But then in 1949 I kind of got away from it. I had to make a living.

Murray: Up to 1949 you still worked for the CCF?

Tom: I was working for them, yeah.

Murray: They didn't pay you very much then, eh?

Tom: Oh, they weren't paying, their wages were very low. And then you see, my kind of work went out of line. See, I was a steam engineer. You know, steam engines.

Murray: You worked on the railway?

Tom: This is what I was doing for the government in Fort Qu'Appelle.

Murray: Were you a member of the union then too?

Tom: Oh yes, oh yes. I still got my (inaudible), I'll show you here. I've had this for years and years.

Murray: It's an old union card?

Tom: Through Alberta, British Columbia and everything.

Murray: Oh, that's your union pin, eh?

Tom: Yeah.

Murray: International Union of Operating Engineers. Oh yeah, that's quite a souvenir, eh?

Tom: Quite a thing, yeah. But you see, that kind work is out, you know. That's how I had to... well, I didn't have to quit but my wages would have went down just as a caretaker in the fish hatchery and I figured I could do better than that outside of there. Because diesel come in which I didn't know the first thing about.

Murray: Right.

Tom: So I wouldn't be classified as an engineer on diesel, do you understand what I mean?

Murray: Right.

Tom: I wouldn't be classified as an engineer then. I had to just, you know, work out so I thought wages were better outside the government than they were in the government. That's what made me leave them, you see. They wanted me to go to Lac La Ronge and run a plant up there. It was a fish...

Murray: Right, that's when the CCF put one in there wasn't it?

Tom: Yeah.

Murray: Fish filleting plant.

Tom: They wanted me to go and operate up there but I wouldn't go that far north.

Murray: The south was your country.

Tom: That's right, that's right, yes. But the wages, really it was the wages, as I say, were better outside the government, you see.

Murray: A private, yeah.

Tom: And I went to Regina Cartage. I worked there for quite a few years, you see. And then I went to Woolco, I went to

Woolco's, you see. I worked for Woolco for twelve years, you see.

Murray: One of the things I wanted to ask you, I'm going to go now because your lunch is just about ready. I'll come back after lunch if you like and...

Tom: What were you asking?

Murray: Oh, I was going to ask you, when Joe Amyotte was organizing in the sixties, the Metis in the south and the Metis in the north couldn't get together because one of the reasons that I understand anyway, was that the Metis in the south felt that the problems of the north and south Metis were different.

Tom: Were different, yeah.

Murray: Was this the same in the thirties?

Tom: No, no, no way.

Murray: They didn't feel that?

Tom: Our problems, there was one problem and that was it.

Murray: That was land?

Tom: To tell you the truth, I never run into anything like that. Right up till the time that I was with them. But then I did hear afterwards but then this Rod I think had quite a bit to do with that. He thought that the north should get more than the south.

Murray: Well...

Tom: And then there was Doc Adams. They all started coming in there, see.

Murray: Well, Adams was for unity but I think that one of the problems was that the Liberal government in 1964 and 1965 was trying to interfere again, see.

Tom: Oh, I see.

Murray: But at the time as far as you were concerned in the thirties, the problem was to get land. And that was the same for everyone.

Tom: That's right. What one wanted, everybody wanted the same thing. Mind you, as I say, social aid did come in there you know, but that was as far as we went because we had to have somebody to speak for them in the legislature, you understand?

Murray: Right. So there were sort of two goals. There was one to make sure you had enough social aid and education and the other was land, eh?

Tom: Yeah, but that was really nothing to do with what we were doing. It was just a grievance committee that we put up to look after these people. You see, because we didn't know their grievances all this time.

Murray: Right.

Tom: We knew that their times weren't too good in the province. So the minute we set up this grievance committee, they heard about it then they started passing their grievances on to us, see.

Murray: Right.

Tom: So, it was really nothing to do with our goal like.

Murray: The main thing was the land?

Tom: Yeah, yeah. It was nothing to do with our goal whatever. It was just, you know, in the meantime, helping them out that way. To see that they get a fair share...

Murray: In the meantime sort of.

Tom: Yeah, in the meantime. For the fair share of the relief that was being distributed by the province of Saskatchewan. Because we felt in a lot of cases - like say there is ten

families living, we'll say, in a little town. Ten families, say five Metis and five white. The white were getting \$3 more on their table than... that we did find out.

Murray: Yeah.

Tom: But we never did what you call, try to make an issue of it, you understand.

Murray: You let that aside until the land issue was solved.

Tom: Yeah, that's right. We tried to solve it on a social basis, see. We didn't make an issue out of it.

Murray: An individual basis, yeah.

Tom: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: Well...(break in tape)

Tom: This wasn't right. You see, now it was through that there is a lot of these fellows that they had working for them. There was a fellow by the name of McGregor. He was on the road. A first class Jimmy Gardiner man. He was an inspector of social services in this country. There was W.W. Dawson which was the head man here in Regina for social aid. He was a Liberal man. And then there was Hayworth. He had one time run against Jimmy Gardiner and lost, but they had to give him a job. Well, fellows like that ain't going to help you out if

you... See, there was a lot of politics mixed up into this, in this social aid business.

(End of Side A)
(Side B)

Tom: ...this is what the...

Murray: But Hamilton supported the idea of going with the Indian claim...?

Tom: Oh yeah, oh yeah. This is, I'll tell you what. Just about this same time, what they were trying to do, they wanted us to go to the north, the Metis from here. They wanted to shove us a way up into the north country.

Murray: On the fringe of the forest.

Tom: Yes, yes. I think what you call him sat in this meeting. Now, I wasn't there at this meeting but what you call him sat in there.

Murray: Who's that, Hamilton?

Tom: No, no. Hamilton was there. They were all there, for a fact. They just wanted to hear what's going on. And Mills, he sat in there. And he had quite a write-up about this in the Leader-Post at that time, that they were trying to shove the Metis people in 'the land of the midnight sun,' is the way he put it. See, and this kind of crushed all. And it dropped a lot of people about this time to shove us into the north, you understand. And this, I'm sure, was defeated later on at a meeting. You didn't have the minutes of the other, the meeting that took place prior to this? It would be then about the last part of 1939.

Murray: No, I don't think I do have the minutes for that, no.

Tom: This is where it shows that we were against this thing because sure, they were going to give us something but we had to move away into the north. Today the north ain't that bad, mind you. There is resources up there. But at that time...

Murray: You didn't want to go.

Tom: Well it's not a matter of not going, but you take the natural resources up there then, there was nothing you could - there was a bit of trapping. You know what I mean, there was a little trapping. Today the resources have been... Like this, lumbering up there. At that time there was no such a thing as lumbering. Now, we couldn't see our way going up there. For what?

Murray: Now, who wanted you to go up there? The provincial government?

Tom: The provincial government, yeah.

Murray: But Hamilton wanted, according to this document, wanted you to try and get land from the federal government.

Tom: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: So was Hamilton working with the provincial?

Tom: With the provincial government, yeah.

Murray: But that was, but...

Tom: Now he, to get away from the provincial government, not to lose a vote over it, then we knew that the federal government was the only ones to deal with. Because in a case like this, really the provincial government has no jurisdiction over anything. You take Blakeney here has given money to these, this organization and stuff like that, and they are raising Cain. They should thank Blakeney for that money because after all, he don't have to give them one penny.

Murray: But I'm still wondering what was motivating Hamilton. Because if the provincial government wanted to send the Metis people to the north, they could have set up colonies themselves, just like the Alberta government did.

Tom: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: And yet Hamilton wanted the Metis to go to the federal government.

Tom: Well, he had to make himself look a little better than that. See, they were really going a little too far with it, I guess, so he had to say, "Well now, we'll take it out of the provincial and put it on the federal." You understand what I mean?

Murray: So it would be removed from the...?

Tom: Well, from the provincial.

Murray: Responsibility, yeah.

Tom: Because he knew that the people were against putting up colonies and stuff like that. It didn't work. They had them before and it didn't work. The same as the one in Tullymet. There was a colony set up there. It broke up; it was no good. There is the St. Paul des Metis. It broke up, you see.

Murray: Right.

Tom: So, they could see that. And when the people were against it, they might have thrown out Patterson, you understand. Just over that same issue. For a fact, not only the Metis but already, what you call it wrote a great big letter towards it. And then the opposition, the Conservatives

really taken. They said, "Oh, they're trying to shove them poor people away." It would just have been a political football. It had to have been that way. So, in order to stop them from doing it, Zach Hamilton says, "Well, we'll put it onto the federal government." That was his idea.

Murray: So it would save the Liberal government in the province any embarrassment.

Tom: Yeah, that's right, that's right. That's exactly what happened there, you see.

Murray: So Hamilton tried to influence the Metis Society to go strictly to the federal government?

Tom: That's right.

Murray: And to leave the provincial government alone.

Tom: That's right, yeah. But then you see, it finally went...

(Break in tape)

Tom: See, what they were afraid, Mr. Hamilton, that would get out of difficulty, that other organizations might think the Metis were getting something done for them that they had not got. You understand? That was what was bugging them people.

Murray: They didn't want to get caught in the middle of a political problem.

Tom: That's right, you see. Now, till we could prove it, who we were. You understand what I mean? Well, you could have come along with an organization saying, "Now what about me? I'm an Irishman. Now there's a big bunch of us, why can't we get what these people are getting." Had we gotten something then. Supposing they said, "Alright, we will give you a township of land right here, the best of land here." You'd want it, wouldn't you? See? Now, they've stepped out of line. The same thing is going on today. I don't know, they are sitting tight with mainly everything because the way they are going at it now, without knowing even what party they represent, that is the Metis people themselves, they could get other people interested. Now, they are getting housing, so much housing right now. What is the German population stopping them from saying, "Well, you're giving it to these Metis people."

Murray: Well, I think, see, what I think what's happening, there is a difference between what the Saskatchewan Metis did

and what the Alberta Metis did. The Alberta Metis didn't go on the basis of a land claim. What they said was "Look at the conditions. We are poor, we have no health facilities, no education facilities, no jobs, we have no land. Because we are Canadian citizens, we want to be able to have the same living standards." And so they just appealed to the provincial

government on the basis that they were poor and now....

Tom: I see what you mean, yeah.

Murray: Now, the Saskatchewan Metis took the approach that "Because we are Metis we have the right to have land." And so there is two different approaches.

Tom: Yeah, there was two different approaches to that, you see. But then, first of all, you must establish what you are, what claims you've got. Then you could go to the government and say, "Well, I'm entitled to this."

Murray: Right, well see...

Tom: Otherwise, you're leaving it open for other organizations, as it says there.

Murray: Except that in Alberta what the government would have said to other organizations, say it was Germans or Irish or whatever, they'd say, "Well, look, as a group you aren't poor. Some of you are poor, some of you are rich. But the Metis, they are all poor."

Tom: They are all poor, yeah. That's true.

Murray: That was the basis on which the Metis in Alberta....

Tom: In Alberta. Mind you, it was a good way, in a way, because...

Murray: Their attitude was that, well, if the government has problems after with the Irish and the Germans, then that's the government's problem.

Tom: That's right, that's right, you see.

Murray: Not our problem.

Tom: You see, that's why I fought it out when we went through this brief. There was no legal right there for the Metis people. There was no legal right. But this moral is the one we're fighting on.

Murray: You sort of knew this before the lawyers even studied it, did you?

Tom: I had an idea but I couldn't prove it. But then I was able to prove it when they brought this brief out, you understand. Then I fought the moral right instead. I'll tell you why, you see. Today it's pretty hard to fight this moral right. But in them days, it was easy to fight it. Because you can't go and leave a bunch of kids on every doorstep, eh.

Murray: Right.

Tom: You see, this is what happened to us. We were left on doorsteps. So this is where the moral right comes in, see.

You know that even Shumiatcher couldn't figure this moral right out. I went to Hodge and Noonan and they couldn't explain. Somebody told them about a moral right and he just put it on there, on that brief.

Murray: Right. See, the moral right was basically what the Alberta Metis used, you know. They were saying, "As Canadian citizens we have the moral right to have land."

Tom: Yeah, and then it wasn't our fault that we were in this country. You understand what I mean?

Murray: Right.

Tom: You see, we had to blame the white man for the position that we were in. You see, so we had a better ground that way than what you call him, you see. And then, Queen Victoria recognized this, you know. She sent...

(Break in tape)

Murray: Do you remember what happened to that brief after that?

Tom: I had it.

Murray: No, but I mean in terms of it being presented to the government?

Tom: No, I don't know what happened to it, no. No, that's what I was trying to find out, how it got into the government hands and into the archives.

Murray: But you don't remember if it ever got taken to the federal government? Like, that's the original idea.

Tom: No, no, we never did get there. Not as long... and I don't think anybody after I left the Metis Society that ever took it before the federal government. I don't recall.

Murray: Wilma Moore was going to take it in July...

Tom: Who was?

Murray: Wilma Moore was going to take it in July 1943 but I don't know if she ever did.

Tom: Is that right? She might have, I don't know, to tell you the truth. Murray is your name isn't it?

Murray: 'Cause you weren't involved then. Murray, yeah.

Tom: Murray, I don't know, Murray, to tell you the truth, I don't know. I was busy then...

Murray: With the CCF at that time.

Tom: I had to look after my own self too, you see. And mind you, at that time we were troubled with insufficient funds. Then again, during the war and after the war, there was too much money for us to make a good organization.

Murray: Everybody had a job and...

Tom: Had work and they had money and they said, "Well, why bother with us? Who needs you?" You see.

Murray: Right.

Tom: That's not why I resigned, mind you. I could have made this better and they seen it. In 1950 when they called me back in again, they could have. But I had to look after myself too. I had a job and everything. And at that time they were having trouble getting jobs and everything.

Murray: But after the war there wasn't so much trouble.

Tom: For a little while there wasn't. But then discrimination come in when the Indians started moving into town. But then, I had trouble one time of getting a... they were wondering what I was, you know. When I went to Woolco, that was back in 1962 I think it was, I went to Woolco.

(break in tape)

Tom: I never attended a meeting so I really don't know how much was going on.

Murray: But you would have heard about things.

Tom: To tell you the truth, I would hear once in a while that this was going on, and...

Murray: Were there provincial conventions and things?

Tom: I don't believe there was. No, I don't think there was. Mind you, I'm not going to swear by it but I don't think there was, otherwise I would have heard about it. Usually stuff like that appears in the paper, you see.

Murray: Right.

Tom: Which I don't recall I've ever seen anything like that. All this up in the north, mind you, maybe the Star Phoenix carried something like that, but I don't know. I'm not going to say that there isn't. But they were having trouble there in the...

Murray: After the war.

Tom: After the war because it wasn't...

Murray: Because people weren't interested anymore.

Tom: It was 1951, I'm sure, when they come and talked to me. Ross come.

Murray: Joe Ross.

Tom: Joe Ross. And then there was MacKenzie and them come to see me. And then I did go to an executive meeting that they had. And there was, who was it from the... they had some from the south, some from the north come to this. It was set on a Sunday afternoon they had it. They didn't have it at the Ruby, where in the devil was it? At the old CYC hall. That's where they had it. And they wanted me to come back and everything and I was holding down a pretty good job at the time and I...

well, you see, the trouble was this now. I knew that a lot of people didn't like it because I was holding down a government job. Touchy people, the Metis people. They thought that I was going to be the premier some day, see.

Murray: That you were out for yourself.

Tom: Yeah, I was out for myself.

Murray: They were always looking for someone who was trying to fool them.

Tom: That's right, yeah. And they always had them suspicions. But then they found out when I wouldn't take it back. But I guess I could have done a bit more if I'd have taken it then but I thought why hurt them. You know, why hurt them if they are going to get something? They should go get it without me being in there. I wouldn't hurt them if there was anything to hurt. Maybe I would have hurt them, I don't know. On account of being a CCF.

Murray: Right.

Tom: You see what I mean?

Murray: Yeah. We talked yesterday a bit about you meeting Malcolm Norris. Can you remember what year that was?

Tom: No. Malcolm Norris went to look for me. He didn't know who I was.

Murray: Was that in 1947 do you think?

Tom: About 1947, I was just going to say that. 1946 or 1947. He went down looking for me at the Fort. But I was here in Regina working, you see, so I don't know how he got ahold of me.

Murray: He may have known you through Shumiatcher because he

was a good friend of Shumiatcher's.

Tom: He could have been. No, I think he found out through the Metis Society that I'd been mixed up in it one time and he wanted me to start up, you know, again. But the way it was, oh, he explained everything. And then, he was in a kind of a hurry and I never heard from him after that.

Murray: Now, you mentioned that you didn't get along with him very well. Why was that?

Tom: I didn't like the way he put it up to me right off the bat.

Murray: How did he do that?

Tom: Well, I thought that Norris was quite a politician. You know what I mean?

Murray: Like, wasn't out for the benefit of the people?

Tom: I don't think he was, to me now. I may be wrong but after a couple hours sitting with him and talking. We went to the pub. It was about the only place I could meet him after work. We went in there and I listened to the guy. And I could pretty near tell you what you're driving at in a couple of hours, I'll have you figured out. And I figured that Norris wasn't there to benefit the people.

Murray: I think you were wrong.

Tom: Is that right? Now, I might have been wrong about...

Murray: But that was the impression you got, eh?

Tom: That was the impression that I got because he didn't like certain things in the south.

Murray: What kinds of things was it that he didn't like?

Tom: Well, different things that they were doing in the south here.

Murray: The Metis people?

Tom: Yeah.

Murray: What things were they doing?

Tom: Well, like politics and one darn thing and another.

Murray: Well, he wanted the organization to be non-partisan.

Tom: Well, in his own way. I thought that he was working for some political party, see. So I don't know, I may have been wrong.

Murray: Did he say that or you just got that feeling?

Tom: It slipped on him a couple of times, I thought.

Murray: Well, he was in the CCF, of course, but I think he didn't want the CCF to be involved in the Metis Society.

Tom: Yeah, maybe it was, maybe it was. But I thought a couple of times, I may be wrong but I thought a couple of times that he was working for the Social Credit party in Alberta. No?

Murray: Oh no, no. In fact, he was really mad at the Social Credit because they sort of tried to corrupt the Metis Association in Alberta.

Tom: Oh, I see.

Murray: But you never saw him again after that, eh?

Tom: Never again, no. I didn't know he was dead until you mentioned it. Because I've never had anybody to talk to about it, you know.

Murray: Right.

Tom: There was a fellow told me one time, why, I don't know, why he didn't like Norris. A fellow by the name of Monette.

Murray: Monette, eh.

Tom: Scotty Monette, he had the hotel in Fort Qu'Appelle. He still lives there because I see his wife had donated some money. I seen it there on that Tele-Miracle?

Murray: Tele-Miracle.

Tom: They are still there. He didn't like Norris.

Murray: Was he a Metis, this fellow?

Tom: I think there was some connection. Twenty-second cousin maybe. Because he told me one time, I didn't talk to him that long, this Monette, but he thought that Norris was trying to sell the Metis down. Now, he might have been wrong, eh. You thought Norris was good?

Murray: Do you remember Fred De Laronde? Do you remember that name at all?

Tom: De Laronde, yeah. They are from around Buffalo Narrows.

Murray: Mont Nebo.

Tom: Mont Nebo, that's it, De Laronde, yeah, yeah.

Murray: Do you remember if he was involved with any political party at all?

Tom: I heard that he was but I could never prove it.

Murray: Which party was he supposed to be in?

Tom: Liberal, yeah.

Murray: Liberal party, eh.

Tom: And so was Mrs. whatyoucallem, she's on there. She was quite a politician.

Murray: Oh,...

Tom: Mrs....

Murray: Mrs. Boivaine?

Tom: Boivaine, no, no, Mrs. Boivaine was...

Murray: Mrs. Halhouse?

Tom: No, no, ...

Murray: There is no other women on this one. Let's see, just...

Tom: She come from Mont Nebo, too. She had two sons that were jockeys or something.

(break in tape)

Murray: I'm anxious to find out about Wilma Moore. Now, you said yesterday that you didn't think that she was too bad a person in terms of her...

Tom: No, no, as far as a person, yeah.

Murray: But did you feel that she was using the Metis people for her own ends?

Tom: Oh yeah, for her own... yes, oh yes, I'm sure of it. Because she tried it on me see, and it wouldn't work.

Murray: It wouldn't work. So that's when...

Tom: That's when she went and supported...

Murray: Vandale.

Tom: Vandale.

Murray: And St. Denis was elected president when she was involved there.

Tom: I think what she done, now, she just went to work and said, "Okay, you'll be the president, this and this and that." And she had enough money and she also had enough education to convince you that she meant well.

Murray: It was the right thing to do, yeah.

Tom: She meant well. And if you didn't read between the lines, you'd never know. But I'm sure of it, that she wanted to be a member of Privy Council. Now, the way I understood at the time was an organization such as ours of 2800 members could have put her in there. I don't know. I may be all wrong but this is the way I understood it to be, see.

Murray: So, do you know of anyone who might have records of the organization now? Would Ed Klein have any?

Tom: No, no. The old organization you mean?

Murray: Yeah.

Tom: That's the trouble, I had them all.

Murray: When it was raided?

Tom: Yeah, when it was all taken away from me, see. So where they are now, I'll never know. I'll tell you one you could go to. She must be alive. That woman would still be alive. Rachel Trottier in Saskatoon.

Murray: Rachel Trottier?

Tom: Yeah.

(break in tape)

Tom: I'm sure of it, that Wilma didn't put her heart into the...

Murray: Her heart was in it for herself.

Tom: For herself, yeah, yeah.

Murray: Because I know that from following things afterwards, now this is when you weren't involved anymore, there was a real hostility after that between the north and the south. And it wasn't really based on any differences in the northern and southern Metis. It seemed to be based on personalities.

Tom: Oh, I see.

Murray: Because Wilma had interfered and, does that...?

Murray: Yeah, yeah, I could see where she would have done that if she could get enough to back her up. And she would

organize the north and maybe take over the south, then she

could have made what she wanted. And you say she finally landed in B.C.?

Murray: Yeah. I think she left. She must have left about, oh, just after the war or something because I can't find any sign of her after that. There was one meeting and I could probably go through my papers here and find out which one it was but I've forgotten where, and I think it was in the early forties or late thirties, where there was a motion to move the headquarters of the organization to Saskatoon from Regina.

Tom: Yeah.

Murray: Do you remember that?

Tom: Oh yeah.

Murray: And it was defeated.

Tom: It was defeated, yeah.

Murray: Why did people want to move it? Did they figure there were more Metis in the north?

Tom: No, no, the Vandales and Wilma again was mixed up in that. But it was defeated by their own. That's why I say, she didn't have too much power with the old Metis Society.

Murray: Just a few people.

Tom: Well, Saskatoon, because she went to visit these people every chance she got. She was with these people, Vandales and all these. She was mixed up with that and the rest of them didn't want that, see. They said, "Leave it at a central point," and besides, the Legislative Buildings was here so anything we wanted, we would...

Murray: Close to the government.

Tom: Yeah, yeah. This was brought up, that's true. I remember that when they were going to move that to Saskatoon. Everything was good and they were defeated. That's the same year that Mike was defeated as president, Mike Vandale.

Murray: 1939 then.

Tom: Yeah.

Murray: That's the year you....

Tom: Yeah, yeah.

(break in tape)

Murray: There was some debate over which lawyer should study the question.

Tom: Yeah, which lawyer should help in the counselling of the Metis Society.

Murray: Who was it that suggested Noonan and Hodges?

Tom: After that, I just forget who brought up the motion but anyway,...

Murray: Do you know if they were friends of Hamilton's?

Tom: Not at the time, we didn't know. Whether they were, I still wouldn't say that they were.

Murray: Right, you don't know.

Tom: I think they were pretty neutral. For a fact, I think that's why we worked them in there, you know.

(break in tape)

Tom: ...1940.

Murray: You remember that one, eh?

Tom: That's where we went, yeah.

Murray: That was after this meeting, in May?

Tom: It must have been after this meeting. You haven't got anything from there on, eh?

Murray: No, not for June.

Tom: I see. See, this is where, from this meeting is where I become president then.

Murray: That meeting in June of 1940.

Tom: Yeah. See, this one was still Vandale's meeting in 1940 and mine was in 1940 and...

Murray: So you were elected in 1940?

Tom: That's right. After that, we went to Saskatoon. But that's when Wilma Moore tried to push too much and they didn't like it.

Murray: So she got involved in 1940 then, eh?

Tom: Oh, she was in there before that.

Murray: But she started...

Tom: Yeah, more involvement in 1940, yeah.

Murray: When was her first involvement, do you remember?

Tom: I heard about her back in the thirties, 1937. I heard about her then. She was mixed up with the Saskatoon. She never left Saskatoon. She worked with the Saskatoon people, you see. But she figured there was a stronghold there for her. You understand what I'm saying?

Murray: And then in 1940 she tried to broaden it out to...?

Tom: Yeah, yeah. That's when she started to get after the other ones and then they turned her down. That is, a lot of these people, you know.

Murray: Well, she wrote letters signing herself Wilma Moore, Secretary of Saskatchewan Metis Society.

Tom: That was after, that she done that. Yeah, because she didn't dare because she knew that, you know, that...

Murray: That people wouldn't put up with that, eh.

Tom: No, no. She might have after. I'm not saying, Murray, that she didn't do that.

(break in tape)

Murray: Now this is something that's...

Tom: "Moved by Fiddler," yeah, (inaudible) continue with Tomkins business in that report... Wait a minute, where did I see this. Oh yeah, "Moved by A. Fiddler, that was Alex Fiddler, you didn't know him, eh?"

Murray: No.

Tom: "Seconded by William Boucher that two separate branches be recognized in Saskatoon." You see.

Murray: Uh huh.

Tom: This is some of her work. I knew this afterwards. That this was some of hers. "By the provincial executive known as follows, West side branch and Nutana branch."

Murray: And hers was the Nutana branch was it? Or do you remember?

Tom: Well, it would be easier for her. She worked at both of them but she could work this one and work that one the same time and have more power because here they were allowed three, three delegates...

Murray: Three delegates for each local.

Tom: Three delegates. So she had six delegates in Saskatoon. You understand now what I'm driving at, eh?

Murray: She was no dummy, eh?

Tom: Yeah, she was no dummy. She was a very smart woman, that. See, this we all knew at the time. I knew that...

Murray: Did they allow that?

Tom: Well, it was too late, yeah. Sure, we thought what the devil is wrong with that? Here Regina was only allowed three delegates and Saskatoon was allowed six delegates.

Murray: And there were more Metis in Regina?

Tom: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Murray: But nobody cared then.

Tom: Well, at the time...

Murray: It was only later that they realized...

Tom: Yeah, that we realized what had happened. You see, Cromarty was a smart man. You see, Dechene and them, they were not from Saskatoon but she worked on them for this motion and she got it through, you see. Which give her more power in Saskatoon than ever.

Murray: Here is an interesting part. You may remember this. "Moved by A. Fiddler, seconded by Tom Major that the secretary write to Francis Dion, Bonnyville, Alberta inviting him to the convention at Saskatoon June 25, 1940."

Tom: Yeah.

Murray: Now he was the president of the Metis Association of Alberta.

Tom: That's right.

Murray: Or, actually at the time I think Norris was because at the time Dion was sick. So there was some contact with the Alberta people.

Tom: Oh yeah, yeah. I know now that there was. This Dion was the only one that we knew. We didn't know Norris...

Murray: Norris or Brady?

Tom: Yeah, we didn't know them, you see. But we knew Dion had something to do with it. That's why that we got in touch with him.

Murray: Did he come?

Tom: No, he never showed up, no.

Murray: He was sick at that time so that's probably why he didn't come.

Tom: Was he? Well, maybe if we'd have wrote to Norris, he would have come but we didn't know. Mind you, we didn't say that we don't want him or anything; we didn't even know who they were. We didn't even know who this guy was.

Murray: You didn't have the communication.

Tom: But this was brought up to us so we thought, by gosh, it's a good time for us to talk to a man like this, see. I remember when this all took place but otherwise, I would have never known, you see. Yeah, this is the one right here. After the meeting when Cromarty come out with this doggone statement - this same Harry here, Harry Cromarty - that he knew what Wilma was up to, he says, "Now," he says, "now how come Regina has only got three delegates, Saskatoon has got six?"

Murray: Right.

Tom: And here all Harry could bring was two because they couldn't afford to...

(break in tape)

Murray: You are talking about the Metis people who enlisted for the Second World War?

Tom: Yeah, they enlisted as French Canadians, a lot of them. Yeah.

Murray: Because they were the ones with French names.

Tom: Yeah, with, well not only that but they figured, well...

Murray: Metis is French Canadian. Yeah.

Tom: Whether they didn't like Metis or not, I don't know.

Murray: Oh, I see. They didn't want to put down Metis.

Tom: They didn't want to be Metis to be in the army. Now, I'll tell you why that is. There was an article in the paper that there was only one Metis had joined up in the army. See, in Regina in 1943, I think, 1942, something like that. It was in the paper, in the Leader-Post. Now, whether, if anybody has got that clipping or can you follow it back, I don't know. But there is one Metis. See, they didn't know a lot of, they didn't know who this. I knew who this Metis was. It was me.

Murray: Right.

Tom: See, I didn't enlist as a French Canadian. A lot of

them, I know, when I asked them there... you see, I filled out their application forms or a lot of them never got in.

Murray: Right.

Tom: Because they weren't educated enough.

Murray: That reminds me, you were mentioning this morning, this is off the topic but I wanted to get it on the tape that when you went to school, the priest put an "e" on your name.

Tom: Yeah.

Murray: So it was Majore instead of Major.

Tom: Yeah, that's right, yeah.

Murray: He wanted you to be French?

Tom: To be French...

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

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