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RONALD HOOK

Ron Hook was a radio operator in Prince Albert. He knew Malcolm Norris socially and attended one of his classes in geology.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Malcolm Norris's life in Prince Albert.
- Malcolm's work as geologist; adult classes in geology.
- His family and their place in the community.
- Malcolm's attitude to his native ancestry.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Ron Hook was a radio operator in Prince Albert when Malcolm was living there.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I'm talking to Ron Hook of Prince Albert, who is a radio operator in northern Saskatchewan, in Prince Albert at the time Malcolm Norris came here. Ron, can you recall the first time you met Malcolm and what your impressions were of him when you met him?

Ron: No, I can't recall when I first met him.

Murray: Do you recall the impressions, what your first recollections of him would be?

Ron: No, because I think at the time probably that I first met him I was not, what shall I say, sufficiently familiar with him to enter into very much discussion. Sort of got to know him gradually over a period of time.

Murray: What did you think of the man? How would you describe him to someone if they asked you?

Ron: From what point of view?

Murray: Well as an, you know...

Ron: As an individual?

Murray: As an individual.

Ron: Oh, I always had a lot of respect for Malcolm, and his family.

Murray: Could you describe him a bit to us?

Ron: Physically, you mean?

Murray: No, as an individual. What were some of his characteristics?

Ron: Well, I think that he was a very dedicated individual, to his work, and to the cause of his people.

Murray: Did he talk to you about political things?

Ron: Oh yes, on occasion, oh yes, certainly.

Murray: Do you recall what kinds of things that interested him most, that he would bring up most often?

Ron: Well I suppose that many people would have regarded Malcolm possibly as a radical. I never quite regarded him in that light, but he was certainly anxious to implement change, social changes.

Murray: Was he most concerned about social changes as they would affect native people? Or was he interested in social change in general?

Ron: Well I think particularly native people, but I think

he was also interested in social change on a broad basis.

Murray: You can't recall any particular thing in terms of social changes that he was interested in?

Ron: Not really, no.

Murray: Just a general thing.

Ron: That's right.

Murray: Do you recall any of his particular political activity? Do you know if he was involved in elections or electioneering, that sort of thing?

Ron: Not in the open. No, not to my knowledge.

Murray: So if he was politicking, it wasn't something you saw him doing?

Ron: Oh no. No, I've never seen Malcolm address a political meeting or anything of that nature.

Murray: Were you involved in politics at all in those days?

Ron: No.

Murray: So you wouldn't likely run across him if he, if he...

Ron: If he was. This is correct; this is correct.

Murray: Right. Do you recall other people's reactions to Malcolm and how they saw him?

Ron: Well I think this depended upon their own political philosophy. If they were inclined in the same direction that Malcolm was, this is one thing; and people who are politically oriented in the other direction might take a violent dislike to him.

Murray: Can you recall whether people would state those opinions at all? Was he someone that people reacted to right away, one way or the other?

Ron: Not necessarily. Not necessarily.

Murray: Can you recall anybody speaking negatively about him? Those kinds of people who would be different (inaudible)...

Ron: Oh yes, oh yes indeed.

Murray: What kinds of things would they say?

Ron: Well, you know, some people even formed the opinion that he was probably a red.

Murray: And that was the only thing they needed. They didn't have to expand on that, eh?

Ron: No.

Murray: If the man was red that was enough.

Ron: That was, that was good enough for them.

Murray: In those days what would red mean? A member of the communist party or just a communist-thinking person?

Ron: In all probability a member of the communist party. Right.

Murray: But would it necessarily mean that?

Ron: Not necessarily, not necessarily, no.

Murray: It would be describing his policy.

Ron: Right, right.

Murray: Was there a widespread suspicion of communists in those days? Was it theory in which people would get upset about that?

Ron: Oh and they'd...

Murray: Were there many people in Prince Albert in those days that would have been classified in that way or were there just one or two of them?

Ron: Oh, there may have been a few, yes, a few.

Murray: Were they active at all? Would they ever run in any elections?

Ron: Not to my knowledge.

Murray: Not in any federal or provincial elections?

Ron: No.

Murray: Can you recall what kind of work Malcolm was involved in?

Ron: Yes, he was involved in geological work, mainly. And he was quite good at it too, I think.

Murray: What were the specifics of his job?

Ron: Well, of course I'm not aware of the specifics of his job, just the general area in which he was working.

Murray: He was working as a geologist?

Ron: Right. Mineral exploration. I believe, if I remember correctly, Malcolm was instrumental in getting this Prospectors Incentive Plan off the ground. I think it was he who first thought of this and got it into operation. And I know that he was involved in serving as an instructor for geological classes. Anyone was welcome. I even took one of his classes myself, but he lost me after a half a dozen meetings. (laughs)

Murray: Can you recall his teaching? Was he a good teacher?

Ron: Well I thought so, yes. But when I entered the class I knew absolutely nothing of geology and of course Malcolm was very familiar and it didn't take him too long to lose me. But I enjoyed the class and I think I learned something from it.

Murray: Right. Was he a patient teacher do you think?

Ron: I would say so, yes. Reasonably so. But he had a lot of ground to cover in a very short time.

Murray: Could you describe him as a teacher? Did he expect his students to work hard at what they were doing?

Ron: Oh yes because he, himself, worked hard I think at anything that he did. So he expected this of others.

Murray: Would he get upset or angry or criticize people if they hadn't done the work they were supposed to?

Ron: Well, of course this was a voluntary class.

Murray: Right.

Ron: And it's pretty difficult to really be specific in an answer to that question. Everyone went there with a view of trying to learn something. Some already had some basic information; they were probably better off than the rest of us who knew absolutely nothing about it initially.

Murray: But he, you don't recall him ever...

Ron: Let me put it this way, I don't ever recall him blowing his cork in a class.

Murray: Right.

Ron: No.

Murray: How many people would have been taking the class that you were taking?

Ron: Oh I would guess probably fifteen or twenty of us.

Murray: And that was sponsored by the department was it?

Ron: Well, no. As far as I know this was sponsored by the

department but it was an evening class and to the best of my knowledge Malcolm donated his time.

Murray: Oh I see. Do you think it was his idea to give this class?

Ron: Oh, I think so. Oh yes, I think so. I think Malcolm was quite anxious to impart whatever geological knowledge he had...

Murray: Right.

Ron: Because I think that he felt that northern Saskatchewan was a mineral storehouse and there just were not enough people who were interested in minerals to get out and look for them.

Murray: Do you recall the make-up of the class? Were there a lot of native people involved or was it mostly white?

Ron: No, no, a mixture. I'd say with the whites probably predominating.

Murray: But there would have been a few natives involved?

Ron: There were a few native people involved, yes.

Murray: And the class was aimed at teaching people so that they could... it wasn't simply an academic knowledge of geology. It was something that you could use to go out in the field?

Ron: To go out into the bush and look for something yourself.

Murray: How long did those classes go on? All the time that Malcolm was in P.A. or was that a particular time that you recall?

Ron: No, I think Malcolm held a number of them. They were usually held in the winter when Malcolm had a better chance of being in town. They were held during the winter months and anyone was eligible to join the class.

Murray: Was there a fee charged?

Ron: No, no fee, nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Murray: And that was once a week was it? Or do you recall?

Ron: I don't recall, but I would say it was about once a week because there were a number of different classes to complete the course. I would say about once a week.

Murray: Can you recall if any of those people who took the class eventually ended up prospecting? Did you know anybody in

the class?

Ron: No, I don't recall knowing anyone personally in the class. I would guess that they probably came from all walks of life.

Murray: You mentioned that you were fond of Malcolm's family. Can you tell me a bit about his family and was he very fond of his children, how he related to his family? Do you know any of that?

Ron: Oh yes I do, I do, because of the fact that at the time that I knew Malcolm, Malcolm was living out at the airport. We were also living at the airport. We both had a young family; the children used to play together. And I would say that Malcolm's family was a very closely knit group. I think that Malcolm thought a great deal of his family. I think Malcolm did his very best for them and I think that the way that they've turned out in after life certainly indicates the sort of family life which they were privileged to enjoy.

Murray: Did you ever get any feeling that there was conflict at all in the family, because of Malcolm's commitment to political organizing? Was there any problem there at all?

Ron: Not to my knowledge. Not to my knowledge. He and Mary seemed to get along very well. The kids were exceptionally well-behaved. They were a good family.

Murray: And would you say Malcolm was proud of that?

Ron: Oh yes indeed. Indeed.

Murray: That was something that he considered important?

Ron: Absolutely.

Murray: Did he talk to you about his family much at all?

Ron: Oh, on occasion, yes. On occasion.

Murray: What kinds of things might he bring up?

Ron: Just sort of general, just general discussion.

Murray: Would he talk about his children?

Ron: I think Malcolm was very proud of his family.

Murray: Did he ever express what his goals were for his children? Did he want them to go to school?

Ron: Oh indeed, indeed. From his point of view this was absolutely essential because they had to make their way in the world.

Murray: So that might have been one of the things that he would talk about?

Ron: Oh yes. Oh yes. I think Malcolm too felt that his children should be entitled to privileges which maybe he, as a younger person, was unable to enjoy. Malcolm was born at Fort Ray, Northwest Territories, if my memory serves me correctly. I believe this is what he said, and I think he came from very humble surroundings. And I think that he decided that he was going to try to make his way in the world; he wanted his family to do likewise.

Murray: I don't like putting words in people's mouths, but I'm trying to get a feeling for Malcolm. Do you think that as well as his political activity, having a job where he was accomplishing something was important?

Ron: It was very meaningful to him. Oh indeed, very meaningful to him. Malcolm was a conscientious worker.

Murray: And that was important to him?

Ron: I think Malcolm sort of dedicated himself to his job, possibly, too, to his political philosophies.

Murray: But they were two separate things.

Ron: Oh yes.

Murray: That he put energy into both.

Ron: Right. I think anything that Malcolm undertook to do he would give it all he had. That was my impression of the man.

Murray: Did he ever talk to you about his frustrations in the political field? You know, trying to make conditions better? Can you express that, sort of?

Ron: Oh, naturally he was unhappy because he certainly was striving for social reform and I think that he was rather unhappy because people just did not go along with it the way he would have liked them to. But I think he also realized that this was a slow laborious business and that he had to be patient.

Murray: Do you think he had difficulty being patient? Was he a man in a hurry?

Ron: I think his own personal feeling was that he was inclined to be impatient but he realized that this wasn't the approach.

Murray: Right. You say he was an unhappy man. Would that be a general impression?

Ron: No.

Murray: About politics he was an unhappy man?

Ron: Oh, he was unhappy, oh, about politics, yes. But an unhappy man, no, no.

Murray: Was he a humorous person?

Ron: He had a sense of humor, yes. He had a sense of humor.

Murray: What kind of things might he joke about? Would it be sort of political jokes? Would he poking fun at people or what kinds of things might he joke about?

Ron: Well, to my recollection of him, he probably joked more about his Indian ancestry than anything else. I think that was a bit of a chip on Malcolm's shoulder. I'm not trying to say that he was ashamed of having Indian ancestry, but I think that he was very sensitive about it.

Murray: It was something that he was aware of all the time?

Ron: Constantly aware of. In fact, at times you almost thought he might have a chip on his shoulder over this.

Murray: Could you elaborate on that a bit? Would he be quick to criticize someone who would comment about native people?

Ron: Well, I don't think that you even had to comment about native people. He seemed to me to almost have an

inferiority complex because he was of native origin. Just to sort of illustrate that a little bit, I remember, oh I couldn't tell you what year it was in, but at Christmas time he came over to our house and he had a customary bottle of good cheer with him. He and Mary came over. And when he came in he produced this bottle and asked me if I would condescend to drink with a lowly redskin. That was his favorite expression was "the lowly redskin." And I said, "Malcolm, if you were the first Indian I'd ever had a drink with, this would indeed be something to celebrate. But it isn't and it isn't by a long, long, long way. No," I said, "you put your bottle away, I'll get mine out and we'll both have a drink together and we'll forget this lowly redskin business."

Murray: What was his response to that?

Ron: He just smiled, sat back in the chair and relaxed.

Murray: But that was the kind of thing he would say?

Ron: That's right.

Murray: Maybe I'm speculating too much, but do you think his determination to succeed at things was perhaps in response to that at all? To that inferiority?

Ron: I think possibly there's a tie-in. That's my opinion. Because he was very, very, very conscious of his Indian ancestry. I mean he'd bring the subject up when it was the last thing in someone else's mind. It seemed that he almost had, as I said before, a chip on his shoulder because he was sensitive about it.

Murray: Was that true of his family as well or was it just him?

Ron: No, no, just Malcolm. No, the children you would never know from their actions that they were of Indian ancestry, no, no. This didn't rub off on the family.

Murray: Right. Would you say that the family fit perfectly into that sort of middle class sort of community as far as their life style and things?

Ron: Yes. Yes. Oh yes indeed. They were accepted. I mean, my goodness, no reason why they shouldn't.

Murray: Right.

Ron: They were a fine family.

Murray: Right. Often native people had a different life style than white people, but you would say that as far as their family was concerned it was the same.

Ron: Absolutely.

Murray: Did Malcolm ever express a feeling that he felt that was important, that life style? Or was it just something he seemed to prefer?

Ron: Oh I think, I think this was something that he preferred. I think he decided that he would like to live as a white man, he'd like to bring his family up in the same manner.

Murray: Right.

Ron: I think he was very successful in doing it.

Murray: Did he ever comment on the difficulty of getting native people to see the white in some way, in a political way, in trying to fight for their rights?

Ron: Well, I think he was working on this aspect of it, yes. I think that he did try. It's rather difficult to elaborate upon this but I think that at times, at least I got the impression, that at times he was a little disappointed with people of his own race because they weren't trying to do more for themselves.

Murray: So he would actually, he would've expressed that to you, or was that a feeling?

Ron: No, this is a feeling that I got, this is a feeling

that I got. That he wasn't, he certainly wasn't happy with the life style of the native people. I think that he would have liked to have done something about it. But I think that he felt that they could and should make an effort to do something for themselves.

Murray: Did he feel that it was solely their responsibility or did he feel that there were forces operating against them as well? Such as discrimination or economic problems or that sort of thing?

Ron: Well, I think, I think Malcolm realized that there was some discrimination, yes. But on the other hand, I think that Malcolm had proved quite conclusively in his own

association with white people that if an Indian made a sincere attempt to live like a white man, and act in the same manner as a white man then he was accepted in white society and there was no discrimination. Because there was no discrimination as far as he was concerned or his family.

Murray: That might have been one of the sources of his disappointment then, because he was treated and respected well by whites.

Ron: I wouldn't be surprised, I wouldn't be surprised. Because Malcolm, Malcolm was accepted and his family too, you know. Mary and the kids. Everyone was happy to see them.

Murray: You mentioned that Malcolm and Mary came to your house one Christmas for a drink, was that something that would happen quite often? Was he a person who socialized quite a bit and liked to visit, as far as you know?

Ron: Well Malcolm and Mary came to our home, I won't say frequently, but quite often. And I think that they also visited other people in the community.

Murray: Were there many parties in those days that you might see Malcolm and Mary turn up to?

Ron: Oh, oh yes, there were parties but I never got the idea that Malcolm and Mary did a great deal of drinking.

Murray: Right. But they would come to...

Ron: Oh, certainly they would socialize at a party and dance or whatever the occasion might be, and mix with the crowd and enjoy themselves.

Murray: So they were very much part of the community in that sense?

Ron: Oh, certainly.

Murray: Do you recall whether Malcolm ever had anything to do with other institutions in Prince Albert, such as the school

board or...?

Ron: Not to my recollection.

(END OF SIDE A)

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