

Mike Mercredi, Frank Tomkins, Ron Laliberte

Métis Political Activist Interviews (Jan 24, 25, 2004)

Tape 3

Start Time: 11:11:43.04

(Video Time: 11:11.43.04) Ron Laliberte: Okay, if I can ask you a couple of questions Frank, about your role in AMNSIS. What year were you elected there and what was your role in AMNSIS back then? Could you tell us a bit about that?

(Video Time: 11:11.56.03) Frank Tomkins: That would be about '72, I guess when I first got involved. There was, I was at Batoche and they were holding elections at the time and one of the friend-, friends of mine that I've known for years suggested that I run for, as a Board member for the Métis. I says sure so, I got elected as a Board member and was a Board member for a year and then the following year there was another election. We used to hold periodic elections, you know, shift type of thing. And I applied with, I, I ran for the Provincial Secretary and I was Provincial Secretary there until 1986 when I finally lost the election.

Ron Laliberte: Who was the President when you were?

Frank Tomkins: Jim Sinclair was the president all during the time I was there.

Ron Laliberte: And what were some of the things you felt that you accomplished when you were in AMNSIS?

Frank Tomkins: I did a lot of fighting.

Ron Laliberte: In-fighting? Political in-fighting?

Frank Tomkins: Political in-fighting. It was, I, I'm from, I guess influenced so much by, excuse me, Malcolm and Brady and my father that, and what they tried to do and I did my best to try to do the same thing, you know, in with the Métis in Saskatchewan here. There was a big problem there because, you know, in order to win a case you had to have the full Board to agree on something. And there was often times when I proposed something and, you know, I, the Board motion would say yes we agree and if it didn't go in favour of Sinclair's idea, he'd invariably, he'd buy one of my guys off and then next motion it was in the motion. That, I had that kind of a problem for, for a long, long time. The only one that really I guess that, and we had an awful time getting it, was the Dumont Institute. You know this was talked about by me and Executive Director for quite some time and finally suggested they'd let the Board, that it was raised on numerous occasions to get the Dumont Institute off the ground. And never any great success that way, there was obstacles all the time and quite frustrating when you're trying to get something like that going and then you have, you have somebody blocking the thing. At an AGM meeting one time at Batoche, Murray Hamilton, he asked, "Frank," he says, "What about the Dumont Institute?" He wanted, you know, see where it was at and I said, "Murray," I says, "It's just a paper college. Just a paper college that's all it is." And this got the membership a little upset. How come we're not moving on this? You know, how come we're not moving on this? And just the very fact that Murray asked that question and I said it was a paper college, I think it was the thing

that really got Dumont off the ground. After that the President was forced to go after government to get the help that we needed in order to get it off the ground. And I was made the first, I was the first Chairman for Dumont Institute. And I think that was an attempt to, to have it fail, so to speak. But there was some other good people on the Dumont Board that were quite helpful. And we managed to get it going. And I'm very proud that I had a little part to do with it.

Ron Laliberte: It must have been quite tough those early years of getting the project going...

Frank Tomkins: ...it, it was...

Ron Laliberte: ...and making a success out of it.

Frank Tomkins: I think the big problem is always, it's always government. Government's always a problem any ways. They'll give you funding sure, you know to do something but then they want to control it. And they weren't interested in educating a whole bunch of politicians for god's sake. And that was the worst thing that could ever happen to government anyway. You get too many educated people coming out of Dumont College it's going to, you know, compete with some of the politicians or even demand some things that rightfully belong to the Aboriginal people. No they didn't want that. So Dumont was a, a hard thing to get started.

(Video Time: 11:16.41.19) Ron Laliberte: So is, I mean, your vision back then of what it could become and what it is now, was that the vision that you had or?

Frank Tomkins: Oh, absolutely.

Ron Laliberte: Yeah...

Frank Tomkins: Absolutely.

Ron Laliberte:was it bigger than that vision, initial vision? Gabriel
Dumont Institute now?

Frank Tomkins: It's getting there.

End Time: 11:16:58.25