

Edward Head O.M., Manitoba Metis Federation Senator. (b. 1931)

Ed has had many nicknames, as a youngster his family called him “Moose”. When he became politically active he was called “The Voice of the North,” and later “Kitchi Piyesiw.” Edward Head was born in Granville Lake Manitoba (west of Thompson), the son of Thomas Charles Head from The Pas and Mary Sayese of Cumberland House, Saskatchewan. His maternal grandparents are James Sayese and Verinique Fosseneuve. His paternal grandparents are Charles Thomas Head and Lizzette Marcellais a Cree woman.

Ed’s parents were married in The Pas, they went to Cranberry Portage and from there, walked to Cold Lake (just south of Sherridon). “The place we lived was nicknamed ‘Moccasin Flats.’ That’s where the Metis lived, and it was the way the Metis always lived. They called us ‘Road Allowance Indians’,” Ed explains. They had settled there because Ed’s grandfather had moved there. His father did odd jobs for Sherritt-Gordon then was hired as a miner. Ed’s grandfather had a guiding business and guided the Sherridon Mine Manager in to the mine, overland from Cumberland House. “Cumberland House was the main juncture going into the north in the late 1800s,” says Ed. “Eldon Brown, the prospector who discovered the ore body at Sherridon came through Cumberland House and needed a guide. My great-grandfather was busy, so my grandfather, James Sayese, met up with Brown and became his guide. He worked for Brown as a personal guide for a long time. Later he went to work for Sherritt-Gordon.”

Ed took two years of schooling between the ages of 10 and 12. As a youngster he fished and trapped. “We spoke Cree with a lot of little bits of French thrown in. We ate a lot of wild meat and a lot of fish. I remember that one of my delicacies that I liked to eat was Maria (Burbot) liver, the liver of the Maria fish that was very rich in oil. They’d fry it and put it on my bannock and it was just like butter. My mother did a lot of canning, a lot of preserving. There were a lot of cranberries, blueberries and raspberries. We used to paddle out with grandpa and his family, a whole bunch of us, we had an 18 foot freighter canoe, we had that filled with blueberries when we came back.”

For many years Ed trapped with his uncle, Val Couchee (an Ojibway from Ontario). Then Ed worked for sixteen or more years as a diamond driller, this work took him all over the north. Most of his time spent in the mining industry was at the mines at Thompson and Leaf Rapids. Ed also worked for over 25 years as a guide at Lake Kississing. In the late sixties he became active in Metis politics. He was a Manitoba Metis Federation Vice President from Thompson Region and was elected President of the MMF in 1975-1976. He is now a Senator of the Metis Nation in Manitoba. In 2005 he was awarded the “Order of Manitoba.”

Ed married Angeline Lapensee, from Brochet on August 7, 1952. They have 12 children, 40 grandchildren and 38 great grandchildren (so far! as Ed says). Angeline is the daughter of Wilfred LaPensée, a French man, and Philomene Merasty, a Cree woman. Ed and Angeline celebrated their fifty-fifth wedding anniversary in August of 2007.



Ed Head (center) leads Metis protesters in a march at the Manitoba Legislative building to demand provincial job creation initiatives on April 17, 1979.

During the time Ed was Vice-President of MMF at Thompson, he and Don McIvor, then the Mayor of Wabowden, worked together to set up Native Communications Inc. (radio). Don got an initial grant of \$75,000 from the government. Early on they traveled to Alberta to consult with Adrian Hope (a President of the Metis Nation of Alberta) who was instrumental in starting Native Communications in Alberta. For many years Ed served on the Board of Directors of NCI.

When Ed was MMF President, the housing program was separately incorporated. Stan Guiboche was the President of the corporation Rancom Corp; the board was made up of one member elected from each MMF region. Ed attributes his loss of the MMF presidential election in 1977 (to John Morriseau) to the fact that he wanted to downsize the MMF board to one member from each region, a vice-president and a president. In this way he felt the board would be more mobile and able to respond quickly to issues in whatever region, “rather than having to drag 23 people around,” as Ed explains.

In October/November of 2000, Ed chaired the Western Commercial Fisheries Conference, which was held in Winnipeg. After the supreme Court “Powley decision,” Senator Head chaired the MMF Commission for the Metis Laws of the Hunt. This commission completed the foundation work for the negotiations for Metis hunting and fishing rights in Manitoba. Ed notes that the structure of the game laws in Manitoba has often forced the Metis to be poachers. He says, “The Metis always took game when it was in its prime for eating, for example we always hunted ducks when they came up from the south in the spring, they are fat and delicious at this time. Moose were only hunted after they had been at the salt licks and moved from eating tree buds to feeding from the lake and stream bottoms. Seeing the water lily flower open fully usually signifies this time. The moose are then prime eating until the rut, and are never hunted after the first week of the rut.” It is of note that the government dictated hunting season has no correspondence to traditional Metis hunting periods.

On March 12, 2004 Senator Head was awarded the Order of the Metis Nation by the Metis National Council. In 2005 he was invested into the Order of Manitoba. The press release states:

Edward Head, honorary senator of Manitoba's Metis Nation, has enriched communities across Manitoba while working tirelessly towards the betterment of his people. He has known their struggles and rose to be a leader in Manitoba, serving as president of the Manitoba Metis Federation from 1975 to 1976 and continuing to act as a mentor and leader within the organization ever since.

He played an instrumental role in the establishment of Native Communications Incorporated (NCI). He has provided strong leadership on issues of Métis hunting rights, for which he was named the lead commissioner for the Commission for the Métis Laws of the Hunt.

Today, Head provides advice and works on many of the issues faced in natural resources including co-management and Manitoba Hydro. He is also active with the Métis Survivor Family Wellness Program.



Lawrence Barkwell and Senator Head at the MMF Mortgage burning ceremony 2006



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