

George Forest. (1924-1990)

By Gabriel Dufault and Lawrence Barkwell

Metis language rights activist and insurance agency owner, Forest engaged in a long struggle to restore French as an official language in Manitoba. He started this litigation over an English parking ticket he received in 1979 and eventually succeeded. George was a co-founder of Festival du Voyageur in 1970.

Born on the 14th day of May in 1924 at La Salle, Manitoba. His parents were Gabriel A. Forest and Elise Desgagnes, a Metis from St. Norbert. He had six brothers and two sisters. His genealogy shows that his paternal ancestor Michel de Forest arrived in Port-Royal (Acadia) in approximately 1666. In 1953, George married Anita L'Heureux daughter of Eddy L'Heureux and Pearl Sorensen. Anita is a great grand niece of Louis Riel.

After a brief time in the Air Force and a short teaching career, George started an insurance agency in 1948 in which he was the president and general manager up till his passing. In November 1959, he was a leading voice in opposing the amalgamation of the City of Saint Boniface to Greater Winnipeg. He served for many years as Vice-president and secretary of L'Union national metisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba.

In March of 1975, he was issued a parking ticket in English only. He refused to pay it and this begins a process that is ultimately settled by the Supreme Court of Canada. On the 13th of December 1979. The judgment rendered by this court reinstating French as one of the two official Languages in Manitoba thus rendering void a law passed in 1890. In this court battle George was represented by Metis lawyer Alain Hogue.¹

He never forgot that his grandmother, Celina Charette, took in Louis Riel in the 1870's when Orangemen were persecuting him. George Forest passed away on the 14th day of February 1990, while attending on event during festival du Voyageurs week. An endowment fund bearing his name was established at Francofonds – the United Way of the Canadian- Français community – by L'Association des juristes d'expression Français du Manitoba. A meeting room at la Maison Franco-Manitobaine has been dedicated in his honor for his contribution to Métis and canadien-français causes.



Compiled by the Louis Riel Institute

¹ Hogue is a descendant of the Beauchemin family who were with Alexander Henry the Younger at his Pembina post in 1801-1804.