

Olive P. Dickason, C.M, Ph.D., D. Litt. (1920-2011)

Olive Dickason is a renowned historian, journalist, author, teacher and mentor. She was an accomplished journalist who won numerous writing awards at the *Globe and Mail*, the University of Alberta history professor came to academia late in life.

Olive was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba to an English father, Frank Williamson, and Metis mother, Phoebe Philomena Cote¹, who traced her roots to the buffalo hunters of the Dakotas. Dickason took her high school by correspondence, because the family was then living north of Winnipeg. She then studied at Notre Dame College at Wilcox, Saskatchewan completing her B.A. in 1943. She then worked for three decades as a journalist for a number of papers including the *Regina Leader Post*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Toronto Globe and Mail*.

Dickason was dismayed by what she found when delving into Canada's past. While there was plenty written about Canadian politicians, hardly an Aboriginal face or voice was to be found in the historical record. At the age of 50 and with her children nearly grown, Olive returned to the academic field to study the history of the relations between French settlers and Aboriginal people. She received her MA in Canadian History from the University of Ottawa in 1972 and PhD in 1977. Her dissertation, "The Myth of the Savage and the Beginning of French Colonialism in the Americas" was subsequently published by the University of Alberta Press. She subsequently produced the prodigious, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples*. She also wrote *Visions of the Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issues*, with David A. Long (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Canada, 1996). This book went to its fourth edition in 2009. For her work in Canadian historiography she has been awarded the Macdonald Prize. She is a recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award bestowed by the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation in 1997, and a member of the Order of Canada.

While teaching at the University of Alberta she was a member of the Metis Nation of Alberta and the Women of the Metis Nation of Alberta. Dr. Dickason was also awarded the title of Professor Emeritus at the University of Alberta. Dickason filed suit against the University of Alberta, claiming its mandatory retirement policy was a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Dickason won her case in the lower courts but lost in a 5-4 split at the Supreme Court of Canada. In addition, she has served on the Métis Nation of Ontario Cultural Commission.



¹ Phoebe was the daughter of Eli Cote and Fabiola Bray and the grand-daughter of Francois Cote and Desanges Chauret.



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