

## **Raymond Francis Gray. (1900-1961): Metis Rights Advocate**

Raymond Gray was the first Metis lawyer in Montana. By the mid-1920s he was working in Helena as a taxi driver, construction worker and truck driver. In 1927 he married Rosie Armstrong and they had four children. During the Depression he became a state-wide Metis leader and was elected president of the Montana Organization of Landless Indians. He was author of the report: "The History of the Landless Cree Indians of Montana." (Great Falls, Montana: Works Progress Administration, Federal Writers Project, 1941-1942). The original copy of this manuscript is held in the Special Collections of the Montana State University Library, Bozeman, Montana. This 242-page paper documents the plight of the Michif-Cree (Landless Indians) of Montana from 1885 to 1942. A copy of the manuscript is also on file at the Louis Riel Institute in Winnipeg. As a result of this work he became determined to obtain a law degree and help his people. In 1946 he passed the Montana Bar Exam and became a member of the Montana Bar Association, the first Metis Attorney in the history of the state.



Raymond was born in 1900 at Choteau, Montana, the son of Cecilia Guardipee<sup>1</sup> and James Robert Gray.<sup>2</sup> James was the fourth child born to Michel and Caroline Gray. Six of their

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<sup>1</sup> Daughter of Joseph Mousset-Guardipee (b. 1853 at Qu'Appelle) and Sarah LaPierre (b. 1860). Celcile (1880-1913) was born at Choteau, Montana.

children were born in Canada, however they moved south travelling past the Sweet Grass Hills to settle near St. Peter's Mission in 1880. James Gray and his brother Joseph were both students of Louis Riel in the school of St. Peter's Mission during the 1883-1884 school year. The families Homestead claim was made in Montana on April 23, 1889 and certified on May 1, 1889. They had another five children born in Montana. Raymond's great-grandfather, Thomas Gray, was a member of David Thompson's party which explored the Peace River in 1802-03. Raymond Gray's lineage includes French, Orkney, Mohawk, Cree and Ojibwa (Chippewa) roots.

On October 18, 1940, Raymond Gray, the State President of the Organization of Landless Indians, with the assistance of James White Calf, of the Blackfeet, and Four Souls, son of Chief Little Bear of the Chippewa Cree, set up a convention of Aboriginal Peoples to try to repeal the laws that discriminated against Indians and to form a program for their mutual benefit. Throughout the early 1940s Raymond continued to work on his law degree and in 1946 was admitted to the Montana Bar Association. Throughout his legal career he served Metis and Indians living in the Missoula, Helena, Great Falls and Browning areas of Montana.

After graduation from law, Raymond opened a law office on the Flathead Reserve. In 1956, they relocated to Missoula where he specialized in helping Metis and Indians entangled in the justice system. He was a mentor to many Aboriginal people seeking to improve themselves and a lifelong contributor to the Montana Salvation Army.

The State of Montana has honoured him in the "Gallery of Outstanding Montanans."



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<sup>2</sup> James, born Nov. 22, 1873, was the son of Michel Gray (b. 1845 at Lac Ste. Anne) and Caroline Campion b. 1837. His grandfather, Joseph Gray was born c. 1809 at Jasper House, the son of Thomas Gray and Marie Nipissing.