

Brian Orvis C.M. (1931-2010)

Brian Norman Orvis was born on 22 April 1931, the son of John “Jack” Orvis (1902-1984) and Catherine Cooper (Métis, 1903-1997) from Balsam Bay, Manitoba. Brian is the grandson of John Benson Orvis and Isabella Irving (1861-1944); and is the great-grandson of William Irving (b. 1831) and Elizabeth Louis (b. 1839) on his paternal side. On the maternal side, he is the grandson of Charles Cooper (b. 1878) and Jane Mary Halcro (b. 1837). His great-grandfather, Jeremiah Cooper was born in 1842 at St. Andrews and married Catherine Thomas who was born at Lac Brochet in 1846.

Before completing junior high school, Brian became an organist, choirmaster and piano teacher. After studies in Arts, Theology, Music and Education, he taught in remote communities such as Fort Severn, Big Trout Lake and Lac Suel in Ontario as well as Norway House in Manitoba. While at St. John’s Ravenscourt School he created its first choir. His Métis Children’s Choir, from Patricia Beach, performed part of J. S. Bach’s Cantata 147 in Cree, with harpsichord accompaniment at the grave of Chief Peguis, on July 15, 1970, in the presence of the Royal Family. He was a founding member of the Harpsichord Association of Manitoba

Brian served as Chairman of the Board of the Selkirk Friendship Centre, Secretary of the Board of the Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres and Secretary of the Board of the National Association of Friendship Centres. Later, he became a Member of the Board of The Pas Trappers’ Festival.



He provided leadership in a variety of roles in the native community, largely through his writing, broadcasting and organization skills. For three years, he was a CBC editorialist on Native Affairs. For 20 years, he was a regular volunteer at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature.

For nine years, he was on staff at Manitoba’s Cultural Development Branch, where he provided liaison with the Aboriginal community of Manitoba. For six years, he taught for the New Careers Branch in its Recreation Leadership Development Program. His northern experience and work with Aboriginal communities helped the government of Manitoba to change the Education Act allowing the use of heritage languages for instruction, replacing a 90 year English-only policy.

In 1969, he was called upon by the Premier of Manitoba to work with the Centennial Corporation to involve the Aboriginal community in all major celebrations of Manitoba’s year-long 100th birthday. He guided the founding of the Harpsichord Association of Manitoba.

He was inducted into the Order of Canada on April 7, 1976 in recognition of his work in creating understanding between Indians, Métis, and other Canadians. Other honours and

awards included life membership in the Selkirk Friendship Centre, life membership in the Winnipeg Friendship Centre, a Special Award from the Métis Community of Manitoba, the Winnipeg Centennial Medal, Manitoba Centennial Medal, two Manitoba Games Medals (Administration), the Folklorama Volunteer Award, the Queen Elizabeth Jubilee Medal, and Canada's 125th Birthday Medal.



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