

Cyril Keeper, M.P. (b. 1943)

Cyril Keeper was born on July 17, 1943 at Berens River, Manitoba. He is the Metis son of Samuel Keeper and Lorna Saunders. Sam was a captain of several boats on Lake Winnipeg.

Cyril was first elected to the House of Commons from the Winnipeg-St. James riding in 1980. He was re-elected from the Winnipeg North Centre riding in 1984, but defeated in that same riding in the general election of 1988. He holds a B.A. degree from the University of Winnipeg, and an M.A. from Carleton University. He worked for the government of Manitoba from 1970 to 1975, and was director of the Native Family Life Counseling Program in Winnipeg from 1975 to 1977.

“Mr. Keeper’s heritage is Cree-Metis. His father was a commercial fisherman on Lake Winnipeg, who, when Cyril’s birth was imminent ‘put into the nearest port’, which happened to be Berens River. Though thus born in Berens River, Cyril’s early childhood was spent on Matheson Island.

“It was pretty remote in those days,” he says. “We had no electricity, carried our water from the lake and lived in a log house.”

Cyril’s mother was often ill during his growing up years which resulted in much moving around for Cyril, his older brother Sylvester, younger brother Lorne and sister Lorraine. They were often placed in foster homes temporarily. Cyril lived in Selkirk and Lorette Manitoba as well as Winnipeg.

For about a year, he lived as a foster child in the home of John and Elizabeth Schreyer, parents of former Governor General, Edward Schreyer, on a farm just outside Beausejour, Manitoba. When his mother was well enough the family would be reunited on Matheson Island.

He received his high school education in Winnipeg and Selkirk, attending Selkirk collegiate, Daniel McIntyre Collegiate and St. Paul’s College in Winnipeg. To finance his education he worked at a variety of jobs during the summer.

He served as a deckhand on the S.S. Kenora on Lake Winnipeg, shoveling coal to fire the steam engines the ship had at the time. When Manitoba’s Grand Rapids power project was underway, he went up there, and was lucky enough to get a job the next day. He has also been a clerk for the Unemployment Insurance commission, worked on a dragline, clerked in a shoe store, taught school on a permit and been a door-to-door salesman.

When the student loan program came into effect in 1965 it opened the doors to the University of Winnipeg where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree. From 1971 to 1973 he was employed with the Citizenship Branch of the Secretary of State in Ottawa, and while there, entered Carleton University to work on a Master’s degree. He was also involved in setting up some of the funding programs for Native groups such as the Indian Brotherhood and the Friendship Centres.

From 1973 to 1974 he was employed by the Manitoba Department of Northern Affairs, then became Executive Director of the Native Family Life Counseling Program until he was elected to the Winnipeg City Council.”¹



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¹ Beatrice Fines. *Indian Record*, Volume 47, No. 3, July 1984: 5.