

James, “Jim” Patrick Brady. (1908-1967)

By Leah Dorion.

James Patrick Brady, was born on March 11, 1908 near St. Paul, Alberta, the son of James Brady, Sr., an Irish immigrant, and Philomena Garneau, a Metis from Strathcona. Throughout his life he was an advocate of Native rights, and a strong supporter of democratic socialism. He helped to found numerous Métis political organizations in Western Canada these included the Association des Métis d’Alberta et des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (Alberta Métis Association), the Metis Association of Saskatchewan, and the Métis Association of LaRonge.

The Alberta Metis Association, worked to secure land for Metis squatters. In his work for AMA, he promoted cooperative ventures to give his people an economic base. In 1941 he became supervisor of the government-sponsored Wolf Lake Metis Colony. He fought overseas during the Second World War, and on his return moved to Saskatchewan where he worked for the CCF government's Department of Mineral Resources, establishing Metis cooperatives. He retired to LaRonge, Saskatchewan about 1950 due to differences with the CCF government. He disappeared in June 1967 while on a prospecting trip in northern Saskatchewan.

After 1885, many Saskatchewan Metis people dispersed into parts of Alberta. Mission settlements such as Lac Ste. Anne and St. Albert attracted many Metis families as a place to rebuild their lives. This created a significant increase in Alberta’s Metis population. Many Metis arriving in northern Alberta struggled to find a land base to call home. The Métis of the Northwest Territories were becoming minorities after 1885. This led to further alienation of many Metis from the emerging political, social and economic system. During this period of future uncertainty for many Metis people, strong leaders emerged.

Jim Brady was born in 1908 at Lake St. Vincent near St. Paul des Métis, Alberta. His father, Jim Brady Sr. was a dominion land agent, postmaster and wealthy storekeeper of Scottish ancestry. His Metis mother, Philomena Archange was one of the first Metis registered nurses in the area. Brady grew up in St. Paul des Métis, the largest Metis community in Alberta. He was partially raised by his maternal grandfather, Lawrence Garneau, who was involved with Louis Riel and the Metis in the resistances of 1869-70 and 1885. His grandfather taught him about the roots of the historic Metis struggles in the northwest. St. Paul des Métis consisted of many dispossessed Metis with militant ideologies, which would later have a tremendous



influence on Brady's life. Members of the Brady family were strong advocates of Metis identity and social equality. As a young man, various politicians, radicals and union supporters tutored Brady. During the 1920s, he worked as a labourer and became as knowledgeable about the political and economic realities of work as anybody on the prairies. During these years Jim Brady adopted Marxist philosophies.

In the early 1930s, Felix Callihoo, Peter Tomkins, Jim Brady, Joe Dion, and Malcolm Norris, joined together to work for the Metis cause. These men are often called the "fabulous five" for their strong commitment toward politically organizing the Metis in Alberta. Together they helped form the Métis Association of Alberta by actively travelling to Alberta Métis communities to raise political awareness. The priority of the Métis association was to petition the government and raise awareness about Metis issues. In 1933, the Alberta Métis Association had 1,200 members in 41 locals.

In the early 1930s, these Alberta Metis leaders with the support of local Members of the Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament, Church officials and medical doctors urged the provincial government to study the conditions of the Metis. In 1934, due to the intense lobbying of leaders like Jim Brady, the Half-Breed Commission, also known as the Ewing Commission, was appointed to begin hearings and consultations with the Metis.



Jim Brady was viewed by his comrades as the political strategist during the commission hearings. As result of their work, the *Métis Betterment Act* was passed by the Alberta government in 1938. This provided Alberta Métis with both land tracts and social welfare programs.

When war later broke out, Brady was refused entrance into the Canadian Army because of his communist affiliations. He continued his political struggles until he was finally accepted into the army in 1943. Brady's war experience effected his outlook on life and made him even more aware of the oppression of Metis people in Western Canada. Brady kept a detailed journal of his war experiences. After the war, Brady moved to Northern Saskatchewan.

At Cumberland House he lived with Cecilia Dorion in a log cabin lined with scholarly books. In the north he worked as a prospector in LaRonge, Saskatchewan, and worked for the Department of Natural

Resources. He helped to introduce cooperatives in the north. Reunited with Norris, they worked together to organize the Northern Saskatchewan Métis Association. Brady was a key organizer of the LaRonge local of the Métis Association. The purpose of the Métis Association of Saskatchewan was, “to organize people of Indian ancestry in the Province of Saskatchewan in order to secure recognition for and realization of our hopes and aspirations towards a better way of life consistent with the opportunities available within Canadian Society.” Jim Brady felt very passionate about Metis enjoying the same rights as other Canadian citizens. Art Davis conducted an interview with Jim Brady in 1960 for the Saskatchewan Archives Board. Brady had this to say about the future of the Métis people:

...they are and have been the victims of colonialism as well as any Asian or African, but they must be freed from all of the pernicious influences that this system of colonialism has forced upon them in British North America. They must be freed of the disabilities, which colonialism has imposed upon them, or the vestiges of colonialism still impose upon them. Consequently, what we would refer to vaguely as the national liberation of the Indian people and the Métis people in Canada, cannot be completed until Canada as a whole and the western world as a whole free themselves of that vicious system which has imposed these conditions on a conquered people. You see the problem was you were dealing simply with the problems of a conquered nation and a defeated people. You see our struggle for national liberation, or a future destiny of our own, that struggle was fought out on the banks of the Saskatchewan River more than two generations ago.

Brady was a great thinker with amazing insights into the history of Metis oppression. In 1967, while on a prospecting expedition with a Cree friend, Brady and his partner disappeared. An extensive RCMP search ensued, but they were never found. Many northerners believe that the two men were murdered for political reasons. Jim Brady was an extraordinary leader and his ability to organize Metis people will be remembered well into the future. Some Metis families still remember how influential Brady’s feelings of pride and dedication to make positive change opened their minds to a different future.



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