

## **Marguerite (Margaret) Head Wyckstandt. (1917-2004)**

Margaret Head resided in Cranberry Portage. She was born on May 15, 1917 in The Pas, the daughter of Harriet Buck and Stan Wyckstandt, a Belgian. Her maternal grandfather was Matthew Buck who had trapped in the Cranberry Portage area in the late 1800s. Her father had come from Belgium to work on the Hudson's Bay Line Railway. He left this job to buy a small store and restaurant in The Pas. Her mother was a widow with one child when she came to work for him and in 1916 they were married. In 1919, her mother became sick with influenza and her father sold the store. He then went to work for The Pas Lumber Company. After a few years they moved to Reed Lake with her grand father Mathew Buck, a Metis trapper. Furs had a very good price at that time and her grandfather asked her father to move to Reed Lake to trap with him. At age seven Margaret was sent to the convent at The Pas for schooling as there were no schools at Reed Lake. She spent three years at this school and learned to read and write in French. "Today I remember only very little of the French that I had known as a child," she says. When she was ten or eleven her family moved further north to Burntwood Lake, between Nelson house and Pukatawagan. Here they set up a trading post and general store, and her father trapped. Margaret and her mother would operate the store as he was away for long periods on his trapline. Every summer they would stay in The Pas or Cranberry Portage, then return to Reed Lake for the other ten months of the year. Her mother would tend to people of the community who were ill, taking medicine from the store such as castor oil, camphorated oil and aspirins she would often stay all night with them. She was also a mid-wife to the women there. This is how Margaret learned how to help people and caring for others has remained a value to this day.

At age eighteen, she moved to Cranberry Portage where she married Alfred Head in 1935. They lived with her husband's parents. In Cranberry Portage her husband worked as a fisherman. The following year they moved to Flin Flon and he got a job with the RCMP. After their third child was born, he joined the Army and he was overseas for five years.

After Margaret's youngest daughter started high school, she started taking in children on a temporary basis until foster homes could be found. She was involved with the Friendship Centre in Flin Flon. She also took a job with Social Services interpreting in court and was active in helping them find run away girls.

At age fifty-one her husband became ill, and after coming out of hospital, he returned to school to become a carpentry instructor. He then took work at The Pas, and they moved there.

After thier second year at The Pas, she was elected to the board of the Friendship Centre and took a job freelancing for CBC in the Cree language, broadcasting in Churchill, Thompson and other northern areas. She was elected to the Board of Native Communications in 1970, and later became secretary of the board. They also formed their own MMF Local in the Pas and her husband took over John Morrisseau's position when he moved to Winnipeg and Margaret became a director of The Pas Region of MMF. In all Margaret served on the boards of the Friendship Centre, the Detox Centre, the Crisis Centre, Native Clan Organization, Metis Women's Association and the Manitoba Metis Federation. In recognition of this service she was recognized by MMF for International Women's Year (1975) and was presented with an Honourary Membership of the Metis Women's Association as "Woman of the Year" in 1978.

After her death on May 17, 2004, the family wrote the following reminiscences:

Mom spent her early years on the trap line with her parents Harriet and Tom Wyckstandt and her grandfather Matthew Buck and grandmother Jeannie (who made the best rabbit skin blankets) in the Reed Lake, Nelson House, Pine Root and the Pas areas.

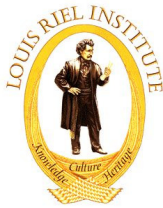
Mom was a strong and proud Metis woman that lived her 87 years in Cranberry Portage, The Pas, and Flin Flon areas. She had a great love for her family and friends; this led to many of her life's accomplishments.

Margaret was a pioneer for her time, being the first Aboriginal Cree woman who broadcasted in Northern Manitoba on CBC Radio. She was very instrumental in establishing the first Cree Crisis Line in The Pas. Mom was a founding Board Member of Rosaire House, The Pas. Her involvement in numerous organizations throughout the years demonstrated her strong commitment to the growth of the Aboriginal Community.

She was one of the founding board members of Native Communications Inc. and continued her membership for 19 years. One of her most recent accomplishments was to be a member and Elder of the West Broadway Aboriginal Resident Group and a member of the Mothers of the Red Nations. Margaret's belief in the AA program gave her willingness to assist others in finding the path of sobriety. In the 1960s and 70s she traveled to numerous northern communities to pass the message of AA and the 12 Step program in the Cree language.

#### *Reference*

Manitoba Metis Federation, *Reflections: Yesterday and Today*, Manitoba Metis Federation Press, 1979: 55-58.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell  
Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research  
Louis Riel Institute