

Elizabeth (Crowe) Isbister (1920-2009)

The Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) was founded on October 1, 1967 and incorporated as a non-profit association under the Companies Act of Manitoba in December of 1967. Those present at the first meeting, who can be called the MMF's founders were Reverend Adam Cuthand, Elizabeth Isbister, Ted Simard, Mary Guilbault, Tom Eagle, and Angus Spence. Later, Elizabeth served as the Mayor of Norway House. She is one of the countless examples of enfranchised women¹ with Métis husbands who worked tirelessly to establish social programs for Métis people.

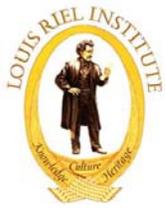
Elizabeth Isbister was born on May 12, 1920, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Crowe. Her father was from the James Bay area and her mother was from Big Trout Lake. When she was four they were at Island Lake when her mother died. She was then adopted by storekeeper and trader Harry D'Arcy. They then moved to God's Lake where she spent most of her youth. Elizabeth took her schooling at the residential school at Rossville where she spent seven years. She was active in CGIT at school and attributes this experience to the leadership skills she developed. She went on to develop a new mother's group at God's Lake and started an organization to get a school for Métis children at God's Lake. She then married Charles Isbister who worked with medical services. By marrying a Métis man she lost her Indian status.

They lived at God's Lake until 1960 when illness forced Charles to move to Norway House for medical treatment. At Norway House she continued to be very active in the MMF as well as being active in organizing numerous family and community programs to assist Métis people. In the late 1960s she was a vice-chairman of MMF; in 1972, she was on the Norway House Community Council, serving as mayor. She was a member of the National Anti-Poverty Organization, the National Native Women's Organization, and the Indian Rights for Indian Women Organization (which led to the Bill C-31 legislation). Into her late 70s, she continued to serve on the Regional Health Authority board, child and family services, the board of the Norway House radio station and the board of the senior's residence. She also sat on the provincial Aboriginal Advisory Committee to the RCMP.



Elizabeth died on March 22, 2009. She was loved and cherished by her family and friends. Elizabeth passed away at her home in Norway House in the early hours of March 22. Left to mourn her passing were her children, Donna (Det), Judy (Jim), Darlene, Wanda, Cameron (Jane), Dennis (Maggie), Michael, William (Winnie) and Keith (Brenda), her sister Frances Valiquette (Marcel), 21 grandchildren, numerous great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren, many relatives and friends in Norway House and beyond. She was predeceased by her parents Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Crowe, her husband Charles, her sons, Jimmy Crowe, Brian, Russell, a stillborn infant son, her grandson Gene and seven nephews.

¹ At the time the MMF constitution provided for full voting membership to these individuals.



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