

William D’Arcy McNickle (1904-1977)

Metis novelist and historian D’Arcy McNickle (1904-1977) became a Guggenheim Fellow in 1963, the first Metis to receive this honour. Later, he was to serve as the founding director of the Newberry Library’s Center for the History of the American Indian, which was later named after him as the D’Arcy McNickle Center. He is believed to have been the first Metis university professor to teach in Saskatchewan. He was a founding member of the National Congress of American Indians. Two buildings are named in his honour; The Newberry Library D’Arcy McNickle Center for Native American History and the D’Arcy McNickle Library at the Salish Kootenai College, Flathead Indian Reservation, Montana.

D’Arcy McNickle attended the University of Montana from 1921 to 1925. In 1925, he sold his land allotment so he could continue his studies and moved to Europe where he attended Oxford University and the University of Grenoble. He later attended Columbia University but did not finish his doctorate. He did receive an honorary Sc.D. from the University of Colorado in 1966. McNickle published *The Surrounded* in 1936, considered to be the first novel of the Native American Resistance in literature. In 1929, McNickle had submitted this book to Harcourt Brace and Co. under the title “The Hungry Generation” and the pen name of Dahlberg. The book was subsequently published by Harcourt Brace in 1936 with a new title and under the author’s own name. He subsequently published two more novels, *Runner in the Sun: A Story of Indian Maize* (1954) and *An Enemy Sky* (1978). He also published numerous non-fiction works, poetry and short stories.

McNickle was employed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs from 1936 to 1952 where he worked his way up from administrative assistance to commissioner and then director of tribal relations.

McNickle was a Metis of Cree, French and Irish mixed-blood. He was the son of William McNickle and Philomene Parenteau. Philomene’s parents, Isidore¹ and Judith Parenteau, were involved in the Metis Resistance of 1885 and had fled Batoche, Saskatchewan after 1885. Their grandson, D’Arcy McNickle was born on the Flathead Reserve in Montana. D’Arcy’s mother Philomene applied for membership in the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (also known as the Flathead). She and her children were adopted and received a land allotment under the 1887 Dawes Act. All of the family was enrolled band members. D’Arcy’s grandparents initially lived with the

¹ Parenteau, Isidore “Wabash”. (b. 1852)

Isidore was the son of Joseph Dodet Parenteau and Angélique Godon. He married Judith Plante at St. Boniface on June 6, 1870. They then settled in St. Laurent where their first child was born the following year. Isidore’s older sister Judith was married to Gabriel Dumont’s brother also named Isidore. During the 1885 Resistance Isidore Parenteau and Louis Letendré were sent 120 miles on snowshoes to the Eagle Hills in the Battle River district to enlist Assiniboine reinforcements. Isidore was one of the men who rode to reinforce the fighters at Tourond’s Coulee. In the written accounts of this battle he is referred to as “le Noir Parenteau”. Gabriel Dumont reported that Isidore arrived with a buggy, a Sioux warrior and a half-barrel of powder. After the defeat at Batoche Baptiste Parenteau, Isidore Parenteau, Patrice Joseph Fleury, Edouard Dumont and Jean Dumont all joined the Spring Creek Metis Band in Montana. Isidore and Judith Parenteau eventually settled in Flathead territory in Montana at the St. Ignatius Mission.

Isidore and Judith returned to Batoche whenever they could. Their son Joseph died in Batoche in 1890 and the family was included in the Canadian Census of 1891. Isidore also spent the summer of 1893 at his old homestead in Batoche. In his claim to the Rebellion Losses Commission he stated that he had lost his entire homestead, a log house, two stables, a fenced pasture for five horses and fourteen head of cattle.

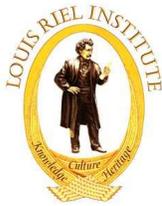
Spring Creek Metis Band in Montana but eventually settled in Flathead territory in Montana at the St. Ignatius Mission and regularly returned to Batoche.

His signature novel, *The Surrounded*, reflects explores the interrelationships between Indians and whites, and between full-bloods and mixed-bloods, and ultimately self-discovery and self-acceptance. From 1966 to 1971 McNickle worked at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus, where he established a small anthropology department.

References:

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