

Joseph Irvine Keeper, C.M., B.A.

Joe Keeper was a founder of the Manitoba Metis Federation and also served as its Executive Director in 1969. Joseph I. Keeper was born on October, 1928 in Norway House the son of Christina McLeod and Joseph B. Keeper. His father, Joseph B. Keeper, attended the 1912 Olympics as a long distance runner where he placed 4th in the 10,000 meter race.

Joe began school at age six and later graduated from Portage Collegiate High School in 1946. After serving 14 months in the Korean War until 1957, Joe worked as a surveyor in northern Canada for Canadian Nickel, a subsidiary of Inco.

In 1959 Joe married Phyllis Beardy, an Anglican priest. In the 1950's Joe saw change coming for his people. Shortly afterwards he began employment as a Community Development Worker in Aboriginal communities. He says, "In 1960 the Grand Rapids Four Bay project was starting. Because a hydro dam was to be built, the native people had to be relocated. I worked at this for 3 1/2 years." In 1971 Joe began working on a federal level; grant processing was his area of expertise for 4 years. This proved a stepping stone for employment on the Northern Flood Committee. The Northern Flood Agreement was signed in 1977 and in 1990 a Proposed Basis of Settlement was signed.



Joe was a major contributor to Native community development and self government, helping to improve economic conditions for his people. Joseph I. Keeper was a founding member of the Manitoba Metis Federation and the National Indian Council and in 1992 was appointed to the Order of Canada.¹ Their statement at his investiture on April 21, 1993 said: "A founding member of the National Indian Council, he created several important Native institutions and is best known for his significant role in the Northern Flood Agreement. He has made major contributions to Native community development and self-government, helping to improve social and economic conditions for his people."



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

¹ Source: *Portraits of the North*
<http://www.portraitsofthenorth.com/portrait/josephkeeper.html>