

Wayne McKenzie (b. 1947)

Wayne McKenzie is part of a group called the Southern Métis Council of Saskatchewan (SMCS), which belongs to the Métis Local 33. In the Métis Nation Saskatchewan 2012 election he ran for president and came 4th against Robert Doucette.

Wayne was born in Regina in 1947. In an interview with Gabriel Dumont Institute in 1981 he says that he first became active politically when he was asked to form an inmate committee while serving time in a provincial corrections facility. He was then employed by the Company of Young Canadians and worked with a group called the Native Projects Society. From there he went to work as a probation officer with the Department of Social Services (sponsored by Native inmates).

He then went to Ottawa to work with the task force called Youth Liaison Program of the John Howard Society.

Subsequently he was employed as a reporter for the Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan (AMNSIS) writing for *New Breed Magazine*. He then worked for the Department of Secretary of State on the Student Community Program.

In the 1970s McKenzie was an Area Director and President of the Regina Local. After an election loss, Wayne McKenzie became the Executive Director of AMNSIS while Jim Sinclair was president and he is mentioned several times in Jim Sinclair's Obituary.

In the early 1980s, while pressing the federal government to create more affordable housing for Métis and aboriginal people who didn't live on reserves, Sinclair and associate Wayne McKenzie were offered \$10,000 for each of the dozen communities they represented. But when they approached Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) about the money, they were told the real sum was only \$20,000: Take it or leave it.

Although shocked, they took it – and were back a few days later (after visiting 14 banks) to return the money – in the form of 400,000 nickels, which they poured on the floor. “Obviously,” McKenzie recalls them telling CMHC officials, “you people have a nickel-and-dime mentality because you're not taking us seriously.”

The two felt that social workers were paying slum landlords what McKenzie calls “big money” so the people they represented could “live in dumps with rats,” and the coin toss was just their opening salvo. “If you don't do something about this problem,” they warned, “we'll be back in a few weeks with the rats we live with.”

Soon afterward, Sinclair received a call from André Ouellet, then the federal minister responsible for CMHC, asking that he and McKenzie fly to Ottawa the next morning. “So, Ouellet gave us the original \$120,000 so we can evaluate the communities,” recalls McKenzie, now 65 and president of a Regina consulting firm, “then signs an agreement with us. ‘Jim, Wayne,’ he says, ‘go out and buy 1,000 homes. Here's the resources.’ ”

Sinclair successfully lobbied to have the Métis recognized in the 1982 Constitution, and appeared as a witness when the fledgling Métis National Council (MNC) sued the federal government in March, 1983, to be represented in upcoming constitutional negotiations.

According to McKenzie, this was a period when Saskatchewan Métis felt that their lobbying efforts were finally being heard. At one point, he says, then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau told him and Sinclair he wanted to discuss constitutional issues with them during a visit to Regina, and suggested they show him what kind of support they had.

So the two put out the word, and “when Trudeau showed up at the Hotel Saskatchewan, there were 1,900 supporters waiting,” McKenzie recalls. Suitably impressed, the prime minister said to Sinclair: “What do you need? You got it.”

By the end of the 1970s, Belcourt adds, Sinclair was a household name in the province, and his organization – which included “lieutenants” Wayne McKenzie and Jimmy Durocher – was a well-greased political machine.

Source: OBITUARY: Jim Sinclair’s long crusade was for aboriginal rights

D. Grant Black, Wakaw, SK. — Special to *The Globe and Mail*

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Margaret Jefferson, “Wayne McKenzie” Interview by GDI, July 1981, Tape # IH-SD.66, Transcript Disc # 185.



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