



Franklin Harry McKay

Badge #253A

WINNIPEG'S FIRST INDIGENOUS POLICE OFFICER

and the First Chief of the Dakota
Ojibway (First Nations) Police Service

By John Burchill, Vice President

Franklin (Frank) McKay was Winnipeg's first Indigenous police officer. He is a member of the Dakota Nation, born in Griswold, Manitoba in 1944. He grew up on the Oak River Reserve, now the Sioux Valley First Nation, located just west of Brandon on the banks of the Assiniboine River in Southwestern Manitoba.



Portage Residential School

Although the members of Sioux Valley First Nation are not signatories to any of the numbered treaties, and today are a self-governing First Nation, they petitioned the Federal Government to grant them a reserve in 1876. Yet Frank's mother still went to the Indian Residential School in Portage la Prairie run by the United Church from the time she was 5 years old until she was 18.

Early Years

Frank went to the Sioux Valley elementary school run by Indian Affairs from grade 1-7. Dakota was his first language and he was taught to speak English at school. For grades 8-12 he went to the Portage Collegiate Institute. He lived at the Portage Indian Student Residence, the same facility his mother had lived in for thirteen years. The residence was split equally with 45 boys and 45 girls. He met his future wife at school.



Recruit Class #69 (September - December 1968)

Back row: Raftis, D. Toyne (St-Boniface), W. Sinclair, K. Dromo (St. James), E. Monkman (St. Vital), A. Galbraith, R. Patrick (North Kildonan), D. Swanson, D. Boutain (Tuxedo). Middle Row: Johnson, B. McKellar, R. Penner (Transcona), R. Wiersma, R. Lang, M. Chiborak (East Kildonan), R.H. Johnson, K. Wingate, R. Bush, T. Lenhurst. Front Row: Sylvestre (Garry), J. Stocki, W. Billeck (Assin.), D. Scott-Herridge (Sergeant Instructor), N.M. Stewart (Superintendent), L. Domaratzki (Assistant Instructor), F. McKay, B. Chikowski

There was a farm located near the Portage Residence where they could milk cows and harvest a garden. All the students had to work on the farm after school as that was where their food came from. He didn't really mind as that was the life was in Sioux Valley. Indeed, Frank felt fortunate to go to Portage Collegiate as the residential school run by the United Church, his religious affiliation, was in Dauphin, Manitoba.

Frank was one of the earlier students who helped develop the integration program in the City of Portage la Prairie on an academic and community level. He was highly involved in school athletics, leading his high school hockey team and league in scoring; skip in the provincial high school curling bonspiel; and represented his school in the zone track meets in the 200- and 400-yard dashes.

In addition to sports Frank was also seen as a leader in his school. He was elected President of the Student Council in his final year in residence, setting the stage for what he would do later in life. In fact, it was during high school that Frank decided to become a police officer. Watching the interactions with the RCMP he came to appreciate that many in his community did not understand the law and the RCMP, who were stationed in Virden some 35 kilometers away, did not understand their community.

Frank's father stressed the importance of education. After graduating from Portage, he went to Winnipeg and took Business Administration at Success Business College. As part of that program he gained employment with Federal Grain Ltd., as an Accounting Clerk.

Winnipeg Police

However, Frank wanted to make a difference for his people so he applied to the Winnipeg Police in the fall of 1967. He "would be a great asset to himself and his people, and to future Indian boys across Canada" wrote the Administrator of the Portage Indian Student Residence. This sentiment was echoed by the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre which stated that "hiring a person of Indian origin as a police constable [of which there were none in Winnipeg] will have much significance to the Indian people in the City of Winnipeg", but was clear that "a man of Mr. McKay's caliber would be a valuable addition to our police force regardless of his racial origin."

Frank was hired by Chief of Police George Blow and he started on September 9, 1968 in A Division (downtown). Frank was part of Recruit Class #69 and graduated in December 1968. He has a fond memory of his instructors and classmates. Of his

police responsibilities he recalls being assigned to do traffic duty in the middle of Portage and Main, and the stares he would receive from motorists unaccustomed to seeing an Indigenous officer in uniform. He also remembered going to calls where the white victims or complainants only wanted to talk with his white partner. On the other hand, however, the Indigenous community would usually come and talk with him and not his partner.

For personal reasons Frank resigned from the Winnipeg Police on May 9, 1971. However this was simply the opportunity to begin again. He joined the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood (the forerunner to the Assembly of Manitoba First Nations) where he worked from 1971 to 1974 for better health on northern reserves.

Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council

In 1974 Frank was elected Chief of the Sioux Valley First Nation. As Chief he was instrumental in establishing the Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council (DOTC). Incorporated in August 1974 the DOTC essentially evolved from the South West Region of the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood. Ten communities made up the DOTC at the time: Sandy Bay First Nation; Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation; Swan Lake First Nation; Long Plain First Nation; Dakota Plains First Nation; Sioux Valley Dakota Nation; Birdtail Sioux First Nation; Dakota Tipi First Nation; Valley River First Nation (Tootinaowaziibeeng); and Oak Lake Sioux First Nation (Canupawakpa Dakota Nation).

The original purpose and intent of DOTC was to “facilitate the development of Reserve Government at the pace decided upon by each member Reserve; by making sure there is total participation in direction of obtaining adequate funds in accordance to the needs of member Reserves; assisting in transferring authority, responsibility of activities to the communities; providing a vehicle by which the communities assist each other in all aspects of Reserve development; assisting in the creation of a method of operation acceptable to the members of the Tribal Council which is consistent with the

First Indian hired by Winnipeg police

The Winnipeg police department has hired a 24-year-old probationary police constable of Indian descent.

Constable Frank McKay, formerly of Portage la Prairie, has been attending recruit training classes for the last three weeks, and “likes it fine.”

“Frank was hired as a Canadian. We don’t take race, creed or color into consideration when we hire personnel,” said acting chief Jack Webster, “he is the first applicant of Indian descent to meet our qualifications.”

Mr. McKay, a bachelor, attended Portage la Prairie Col-

legiate Institute where he attained a partial Grade 12 standing in the general course.

Vincent Salay, former student president of the collegiate said, “Frank is a real fine guy, and a good athlete too.”

Mr. McKay’s application was received by the police force about six months ago, and he was accepted Sept. 9. He will be a probationary constable for one year, as is custom, before becoming a full constable.

Mr. McKay was employed as a clerk with a local grain company before his application was accepted.

Winnipeg Tribune, September 28, 1968

responsibility and obligations of the Government of Canada”.

Frank was appointed the first Chair of the DOTC. One of the objectives of the DOTC was to establish their own police department. They did not want a band constable program under the Indian Act, but actual police officers who lived in the community (not 35 kilometers away) and understood their community.

The formation of the DOTC Police Department, now the First Nation Police Service, was prepared and agreed to by all Chiefs of the DOTC in December 1974. After three years of negotiations, funding was approved by the different levels of government and in 1977 the police department commenced operations with one Chief of Police and nine members. The program was funded by Indian & Northern Affairs Canada from 1977 to 1993. The development of the Police Department was to establish local control and accountability to the DOTC First Nation communities.

First Chief of Police

The DOTC Police Department started on April 1, 1977 with Frank as its first Chief of Police. Recruit training was done out of the RCMP Depot in Regina with all

10 members including Frank enrolled. The class consisted of 24 other Indigenous police officers from the Blood Tribe and Hobama Police Departments in Alberta.

The original uniforms of the DOTC Police Department were green in colour to differentiate them from the RCMP.

Frank remained Chief of Police until 1983. However, he returned to the helm in 1986 and would shortly appear before the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, commissioned in 1988, to explain the DOTC and its policing operations in Manitoba. Frank observed that Aboriginal constables' skills are much better in defusing a crisis in family conflict situations, handling them calmly, even-handedly and non-aggressively. An evaluation of the DOTC supported this view, stating that "by sharing the same or a similar culture and knowing the disputants personally, the DOTC officers are better able than regular members of the RCMP to deal with conflict situations by finding alternative remedies to maintain order."

The Commission also found that the 1983 evaluation showed some evidence that the presence of DOTC police led to a decrease in the numbers of reserve residents who became involved in the criminal justice system and recommended that it was preferred to regular RCMP policing. The Commission subsequently recommend that Aboriginal communities be encouraged to form regional police forces and regional police commissions following the model of the DOTC Police Department, established under Aboriginal control and management.

Frank subsequently appeared before the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1990 to further speak about policing First Nations communities and their primary objectives to reduce crime; reduce the number and the cost to the taxpayers of prison terms by First Nations people; improve the police services received by First Nations community members; attract and retain suitable persons as police officers; and to concentrate on proactive policing as opposed to reactive policing.



DOTC Recruit Class, Brandon Police, 2001. Frank McKay is seated third from left in the first row.

First Nations Chiefs of Police Assoc.

In 1992 Frank had helped establish the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association (FNCPA) and became its first President in January 1993. He held the position for two years and was Vice-President for another two. The other founding members of the FNCPA were the Akwesasne Mohawk Police, Siksika Law Enforcement, Louis Bull Police Department, Six Nations Police, Blood Tribe Police, Nishnawbe-Aski Police Service, and Eskasoni Police Department.

The purpose of the FNCPA is to serve First Nations police services and First Nations territories across Canada by facilitating the highest level of professionalism and accountability, in a manner that reflects the unique cultures, constitutional status, social circumstances, traditions and aspirations of First Nations.

The FNCPA received formal recognition from the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and was also recognized by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP). The FNCPA now has representation on the CACP Board of Directors and continues to participate on the Aboriginal Policing Directorate Coordination Committee. This liaison committee has formulated a solid working relationship with members of Public Safety Canada to explore ways and means for improving First Nations Policing across Canada.

Unfortunately, in November of 1993, the DOTC Police ceased operations due to a lack of funding commitment from the Province of Manitoba. At the time funding was done on a four-month term basis, which made it almost impossible to plan if you continually had to worry about funding.

Dakota Ojibway Police Service

Tripartite negotiations reconvened in 1994 and on May 19, 1994 the DOTC Council of Chiefs and representatives from both levels of Government and the RCMP were able to secure an Interim Policing Service Agreement which saw the restoration of joint policing services to seven of the DOTC First Nation communities. By December 1994 a long-term



Tripartite Agreement was finalized and on February 1, 1995, the new Dakota Ojibway Police Service (DOPS) resumed full-time policing services to six DOTC First Nation communities: Birdtail Sioux First Nation, Dakota Plains Wahpeton Nation, Long Plain First Nation, Canupawakpa Dakota Nation, Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation, and Sioux Valley Dakota Nation.

Frank continued as Chief and in 1999 he entered into negotiations with the Brandon Police Service to provide recruit training to DOPS members. The first class of nine recruits graduated from the Brandon Police Academy in 2001. He also negotiated with the Canadian Police College to send his members for advanced training in subjects such as advanced investigations and forensics.

Retirement

In 2003 Frank retired from DOPS at the age of 60, although he continued to work in the justice system

as a “court communicator” for the DOTC Justice Committee and as a member of the National Parole Board. At the time he retired DOPS patrolled six Manitoba First Nations communities – Sioux Valley-Dakota, Birdtail-Sioux, Canupawakpa, Roseau River, Sandy Bay and Dakota-Tipi. The force was approved for a total of 26 officers, responsible for policing 7,500 residents. They were backed by a staff of 10 support personnel and had established an auxiliary constable, summer student and ride-along programs.

On June 1, 2018 DOPS was renamed the First Nations Police Service (FNPS). It is one of the longest operating First Nation police services in Canada. The FNPS is currently authorized for thirty-six (36) officers employed across six First Nations communities, one Criminal Investigator, one Crime Prevention School Resource Officer, and two Administrative Officers.

Although Frank was the first Indigenous officer hired by the Winnipeg Police, a founding member and the first Chief of Police of the DOTC/DOPS police department, and a founding member and inaugural President of the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association, he was never recognized for his police and community service.

Although a few years late I set out to correct this oversight and on November 21, 2019, Frank was recognized in front of his family and peers by Winnipeg Police Chief Danny Smyth and Attorney



General Cliff Cullen with the Manitoba Law Enforcement Award for Excellence.

Frank still lives in Sioux Valley where he enjoys time with his family and horses.



DOTC Police patch, DOPS patch, and First Nations Chiefs of Police Association original logo