

5/2/2016

North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission
600 E Boulevard Ave.
1st Floor Judicial Wing, RM. 117
Bismarck, ND 58505

To the Commission,

This is a Letter of Reference for Patrick "Aun nish e nau bay" Gourneau, who is deserving of recognition for the Hall of Honors. Many times over the years other tribal leaders, old and younger, have told me of their appreciation and affection for my grandfather, who had an impact on and off reservation through political processes and advocacy for all constituents.

One year I had the opportunity to participate with my mother Rita in a symposium at the State Historical Society in Bismarck. We had been contacted by Marilyn Hudson, tribal historian at Fort Berthold, whose father and tribal chairman Martin Cross had been an old Wahpeton Indian School classmate and lifelong friend of Pat. She gave us a valuable firsthand account of how these intertribal friendships helped form national political movements and actions to confront social and racial injustices, such as work to oppose Termination proceedings.

He was the first person my sisters and I ever knew who wrote a book. This made us think we could do it and we did. He encouraged the younger generations' interest in everything from Native language, singing, arts and crafts (making regalia, peace pipes and hand drums) to careers in the sciences and technology. Elders have told me how he taught them to dance when they were kids. His was a determined yet generous, kind and selfless nature in the ways he related to his family, tribal community and outsiders. His son Charlie wrote:

"His most unselfish act was the refusal to accept a salary and the use of an automobile to conduct tribal business. he instead chose to work two jobs, one to support his family and one to support his tribe. he worked late and unusual hours, getting by on two and three hours of sleep a night."

One story that touched me in particular is of a woman who had been institutionalized and sterilized in the state facility for developmentally disabled persons back in the 1950s. She was able to get word to Pat who intervened to accomplish her discharge. She wrote very eloquent letters to the family expressing her gratitude for his help in such a seemingly hopeless situation.

There are many more stories I could tell from other Indians but I will provide this quote from Robert Cory, Minot Daily News "Tumbling Around These Prairies" columnist in the 1950s.

When Pat Gourneau of Belcourt sat down the other day and wrote me a letter, he did not know that he was writing this week's Tumbling column.

I've mentioned Pat before, with a hint about the good sense of humor he has. He is chairman of the tribal advisory committee of the Turtle Mountain Indians. In that capacity he testified at the hearing in Washington on the bill to end federal supervision over the people of the Turtle Mountain reservation. Last February I had the good fortune of an opportunity to become better acquainted with him. That was when he and Joe DeCoteau consented to accompany Roy Thorson and myself on a tour of the reservation and its homes.

For good sense, intelligence, and a fineness of personality which he possesses, I would be willing to stack Pat up for comparison with any public official or community leader in the state of North Dakota. Not the least of his abilities is the ability to express himself.

Pat offers his comment on that question of whether degree of blood is a factor of any considerable importance in defining Indian rights. he goes on from there to express his views on a matter which provokes him particularly at this time. That is the matter of the jurisdictional dispute between the federal government and the state over responsibility for providing the educational, welfare and law enforcement services that the Indian people have need of.

"It does not alter the fact that the Federal Government has recognized, negotiated with, segregated and maintained us on a reservation (and a darn poor one at that) as Indians. That fact is definition enough of an Indian so far as the Turtle Mountain Chippewas are concerned. Not so with Senator Watkins, however," wrote Pat. He went on to provide a detailed discussion of the law and how the Termination would affect North Dakotans, interspersed with his signature colorful verbal illustrations. This letter to a friend ended up being a public education forum.

Pat Gourneau is from a time when tribal people had very little voice in the juggernaut of forces bent on eradicating any political or cultural cohesiveness among the far-flung Native nations. He was an example of a hard-working subsistence farmer who somehow found ways to influence others and be an active proponent and role model with the limited means and education that tribal leaders had then.

He would be pleased to see how many successful and professional leaders have arisen from the native population of North Dakota. They all have benefited from the foundational work of old time leaders who had to struggle just for basic rights and recognition to make better things possible. Please give serious consideration to this nomination of Patrick "Aun nish e nau bay" Gourneau to be remembered in the Hall of Honors.

Sincerely,

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