

IN THE MÉTIS NATION BRITISH COLUMBIA'S SENATE

Appeal Name: *Reese v. MNBC Central Registry*
File:181

Date: January 22, 2024
Senate Clerk: Bill Bresser
Location: Richmond, BC

Between:

Tonya Marlene Reese

Applicant

And:

**Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC)
Ministry of Citizenship**

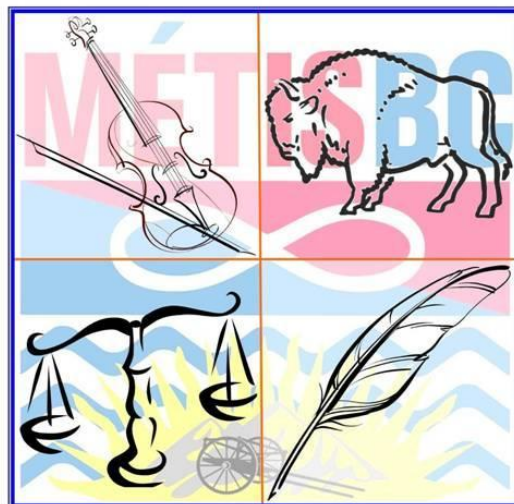
Respondent

Reasons for Decision

Presiding Senators:

Senator Alan Edkins
Senator Gerald Pope
Senator Fern Hinse

Senator Phillip Gladue
Senator John Sayers



MNBC Senate

Introduction

[1] On May 23, 2023 the Ministry of Citizenship, Metis Nation British Columbia (MNBC), advised Tonya Nelson (nee Reese) by letter that “In efforts to strengthen the integrity of the MNBC Citizenship Registry, a Registry audit was conducted under Article 6.1 of the MNBC *Citizenship Act* (the “Act”) regarding the completeness of citizenship files. You have received this letter as your citizenship file does not meet the requirements for Métis citizenship as set out in Article 3.1 of the Act.”

[2] It was further stated in this letter that “Under Article 6.6 of the Act, a person who is placed under review by the Ministry of Citizenship will be ineligible to apply for further programs or services through MNBC. If a person’s citizenship is revoked, the person will continue to receive programs/services for sixty days following the review notice.”

[3] Furthermore, “With your file being designated as insufficient for citizenship, under Article 6.1.b of the Act, you will have sixty days from the stated date on this letter to provide supporting documentation that would satisfy the criteria under Article 3 of the Act for citizenship eligibility. If no additional supporting documentation is received, or, the supporting documentation provided is insufficient for objectively verifying the citizenship criteria under Article 3 of the Act, then your citizenship will be revoked. Notice of revocation will be provided in writing and will be final.”

[4] On July 24, 2023 the Ministry of Citizenship notified Tonya Nelson (nee Reese) as follows. “This letter is to provide notice that the Citizenship Under Review period on your file has concluded and your citizenship with Métis Nation British Columbia has been revoked.” Further, that “The audit assessment completed on your file determined that there was no connection to the historic Métis Nation through a verifiable Métis ancestor. While your ancestry may have indigenous people(s) within it, those ancestors must be distinct from other Nations, such as First Nations, to be verifiable as Métis. The Ministry of Citizenship was unable to establish a Métis ancestral connection, which is the reason for your ineligibility. We hope that you continue to explore your ancestors’ stories and honour the cultures that make you who you are.” Furthermore, “If you would like further

clarification on this verdict, please reach out to the Ministry of Citizenship at citizenship@mNBC.ca or by phone at 604-557-5851 / 1-800-940-1150. If you do not agree with this verdict and wish to pursue an appeal, please visit the MNBC Senate webpage (mNBC.ca/senate) and fill out the Citizenship Appeal Form under the Resources Section. Once completed, submit your form via e-mail to both citizenship@mNBC.ca and to senateclerk@mNBC.ca, or by mail at the address stated above. Please note that you have sixty (60) days from the date of this notice to submit an appeal.”

[5] On September 12, 2023 the Senate received a mailed request for a citizenship and/or central registry appeal hearing request dated September 8, 2023 from Tonya Nelson (nee Reese). The request was accepted by the Senate with follow-up demand to provide a list of documents and notice to produce documents served on the Ministry of Citizenship. The Senate received these documents between October 12, 2023, and January 19, 2024.

Summary of the Case Law and MNBC Legislation

[6] Canadian Law

[2] Subsections 35(1) and (2) of the *Constitution Act*, 1982 being Schedule B to the *Canada Act*, 1982 (U.K.), 1982, c. 11 state:

35(1) the existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the “aboriginal peoples of Canada” are hereby recognized and affirmed.

35(2) in this act, “**aboriginal peoples of Canada**” includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada.

[7] The definitive Supreme Court of Canada case setting out the requirements for establishing a Métis constitutional right is **R v. Powley**, (2003) 2 S.C.R. 207, 230 D.L.R. (4th) 1, 177 C.C.C. (3d) 193, 2003 SCC 43. At paragraph 10, the Court defined the term “Métis” as it is used in s. 35, finding that while the term does not encompass all individuals with mixed Indian and European heritage; rather it refers to:

“distinctive people who, in addition to their mixed ancestry, developed their own customs, way of life, and a recognizable group identity separate from their Indian or Inuit and European forebears. Métis communities evolved and flourished prior

to the entrenchment of European control, when the influence of European settlers and political institutions became pre-eminent.”

[8] MNBC Legislation, Policies and Administrative Standards and Practices

Section 61 of the MNBC *Constitution Act* states that a Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation. The MNBC *Constitution* further states the following:

a) 61.1 “Historic Métis Nation” means the Aboriginal people then known as Métis or Half-Breeds who resided in Historic Métis Nation Homeland.

b) 61.2 “Historic Métis Nation Homeland” means the area of land in west central North America used and occupied as the traditional territory of the Métis or Half-Breeds as they were then known.

c) 61.3 “Métis Nation” means the Aboriginal people descended from the Historic Métis Nation, which is now comprised of all Métis Nation citizens and is one of the “aboriginal peoples of Canada” within Section 35 of the *Constitution Act* of 1982.

d) 61.4 “Distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples” means distinct for cultural and nationhood purposes.

[9] Articles 2, 3, and 4 of the MNBC *Citizenship Act* further define the MNBC *Constitution* definition of Métis as stated above and, more specifically, the process in identifying citizens.

[10] Articles 6, 7, and 8 of the MNBC *Citizenship Act* highlight the roles and responsibilities of the Central Registry, Registry Office and the Registrar. It further states in 8.0 that the registrar must adhere to all policies and procedures developed by the MNBC. This includes the MNBC Guidebook, Central Registry Policy and Procedures and the Senate Policy Manual and Administrative Standards and Practices.

[11] Section 982 of the Senate Policy Manual highlights the process utilized when conducting a citizenship and/or central registry appeal.

Second Genealogical Opinion

Société historique de Saint-Boniface

[12] Halley Ducharme, genealogist, Société Historique de Saint-Boniface supplied a second professional opinion by letter dated September 21, 2023. Halley Ducharme indicated the following:

*“The information submitted by your client, Ms. Tonya Marlene Reese, has been carefully reviewed. We were able to track back the lines in question into the Yale & Cariboo district of British Columbia. That being said, while we **often** see Métis self-identification occurring in families originating on the West Coast; an individual member of this family clearly **is** ethnically identified as English-Breed (Annie King nee Ingram) on the 1901 Canada Census. While the delineation of the Historic Métis Nation Homeland and whether or not this family falls into it is unclear; the fact that Annie is identified in such a way as to acknowledge both sides of her heritage does not appear to be counted among the “Treaty Indians” of the region on the 1901 Canada census, does suggest that she may indeed have been considered Métis. However, on numerous census records, Annie is identified as “English” and the 1901 Canada census as “English Breed” suggesting that perhaps this family was in actuality comprised of “mixed-blood” people, whose designation as English Breeds on the census is a literal expression of their mixed heritage rather than an indication of cultural belonging to the Historic Métis Nation. However, at this time, we are unable to prove that there is any cultural similarity or shared history between this family and the Historic Métis Nation.”*

The Standard of Review

[13] The Senate’s role is to ensure that all legislation, policies, and administrative standards and practices were adhered to, and that the applicant has received a fair decision during the application review period. Since this appeal involves a question around the genealogical interpretation of the respondent, a second professional opinion

was ordered to assist in their review. Furthermore, the Senate will adhere to the citizenship and/or central registry appeal process highlighted in Section 982 of the Senate Policy Manual. The Senate further understands that the onus to prove citizenship is the responsibility of the applicant, Tonya Marlene Nelson (nee Reese), not the respondent, the MNBC Ministry of Citizenship.

[14] The Senate has based this decision on the evidence supplied by the applicant and respondent and weighs this to the summary of case law at the time of the hearing.

Analysis

MNBC Policy and Procedure Adherence

[15] The applicant did request that a review of the policies and procedures be conducted. However, the Senate, upon review, found the MNBC Ministry of Citizenship did not violate or over-look any policies or procedures.

Genealogical Interpretation

[16] Both the MNBC Ministry of Citizenship and the Société Historique de Saint-Boniface indicated that they could not determine a link and/or ancestor that identifies as Métis and connect into the Historic Métis Nation.

[17] Based on the information supplied, testimony and the genealogical opinions (MNBC Ministry of Citizenship and the Société Historique de Saint-Boniface) the Senate could not identify a genealogical connection to the Métis Homeland in Tonya Marlene Reese's genealogy.

MNBC Legislative Adherence

[18] Tonya Marlene Reese failed to comply with three parts of the National Definition as specified in the MNBC *Citizenship Act*. Those being to supply:

- i) appropriate documentation that proves his historic Métis Ancestry;
- ii) appropriate documentation that proves any Métis ancestry that connects to the Historic Métis Nation Homeland; and
- iii) evidence which would identify a historic Métis "distinctiveness."

Decision

[20] The MNBC Senate finds in favour of the Métis Nation British Columbia Ministry of Citizenship.

[17] It ought to be noted that should the parameters for MNBC citizenship change, or if Tonya Marlene Nelson (nee Reese) discovers new information or documentation, that this decision does not limit or negate the applicant from reapplying for MNBC citizenship.

BEFORE...

Senator Alan Edkins

Senator Phillip Gladue

Senator Fern Hinse

Senator Gerald Pope

Senator John Sayers