

**HEARD IN FRONT OF THE MÉTIS NATION BRITISH COLUMBIA'S SENATE**

Appeal Name: Peterson vs. MNBC Central Registry  
5-08-08-44-2-00112

Date: December 06, 2013  
Senate Clerk: Thibeault  
Location: Richmond

Between:

**John Vincent Peterson**

Applicant

And

**Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC)  
Central Registry**

Respondent

**Reasons for Decision**

Residing Senators:

Senator Gerald Pope

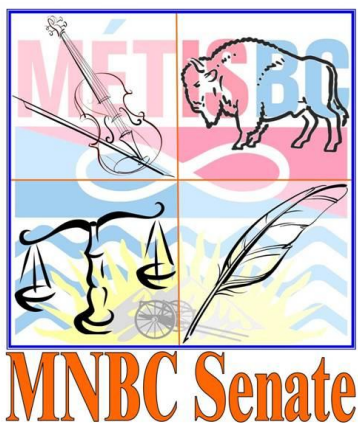
Senator Philip Gladue

Senator Margaret Penner

Senator Alan Edkins

Senator Al Desmarais

Senator Betty Hoogendoorn



## **Introduction**

[1] On May 15, 2009 the applicant, Mr. John Vincent Peterson received a letter from the respondent, the MNBC Central Registry, indicating that his citizenship could not be validated or verified based on the qualifiers for MNBC Citizenship. Specifically, the respondent's letter highlighted the following:

*"In regard to your application for a Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) citizenship card, the MNBC's Office of the Provincial Registrar must inform you that based on the definition for the Métis, ratified in September 2002 by the Métis Nation General Assembly, MNBC cannot verify your genealogical connection to the traditional Métis homeland.*

*The Métis national definition requires MNBC citizenship applicants to validate and verify genealogical ties to the traditional Métis Homeland, and the founders of the Métis Nation. The genealogy and supporting documentation you have provided does not meet the above noted criteria and therefore the Office of the Provincial Registrar is not able to validate and verify your genealogy for MNBC citizenship."*

[2] The applicant submitted additional information and there was subsequent communication between the applicant and the respondent. On March 05, 2012 the applicant, Mr. John Vincent Peterson received an additional letter from the respondent, the MNBC Central Registry, again indicating that his citizenship could not be validated or verified based on the qualifiers for MNBC Citizenship. Specifically, the respondent's letter highlighted the following:

*"Thank you for the additional genealogical documentation for your application for Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) citizenship.*

*Please be advised, that the Central Registry has reviewed the genealogical documentation and is unable to verify your genealogical connection to a Métis ancestor. The genealogical information you have provided with your application therefore, does not meet the required criteria for Métis citizenship within the province of British Columbia."*

However, the applicant has requested the Senate to review the applicant's citizenship application package and all related materials and decide if the process and interpretations of the registrar was consistent with the intent of the "national definition" and the **MNBC Citizenship Act**.

### **Summary of the Case Law and MNBC Legislation**

#### **a) Canadian Law**

[3] 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.*

[4] 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 of the Constitution Act, 1982, finding that while the term does not encompass or include all individuals with mixed Indian and European heritage, it does refer to:

*...distinctive peoples 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."*

Later in paragraph 10, the Court provided further wording in regard to clarification of the understanding of the term "Métis" specifying that:

*"The Métis developed separate and distinct identities, not reducible to the mere fact of their mixed ancestry: "What distinguishes Métis people from everyone else is that they associate themselves with a culture that is distinctly Métis." (RCAP Report, vol.4 at p202)."*

**b) MNBC Legislation, Policies and Procedures**

[5] Section 61 of the **MNBC Constitution** 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.

[6] 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.

[7] 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 and Procedures version 3.2.

[8] Section 6.2 of the **Senate Policies and Procedures ver. 3.2** highlights the process utilized when conducting a citizenship and/or central registry appeal.

**Privacy Consent to Release**

[9] On March 09, 2012 Mr. Peterson supplied a signed and witnessed "Consent to Release Confidential Information" form. This form provided the Senate with the following consents:

- i. Utilization of the documentation supplied to the MNBC Central Registry for the purpose of the applied for appeal.
- ii. To send the contents of Mr. Peterson's citizenship application file to a third-party for a second professional genealogical opinion.
- iii. To utilize all the information supplied or demanded, for the purpose of writing this MNBC Senate decision.

## Second Genealogical Opinion

### a) Société historique de Saint-Boniface

[10] Ms. Janet La France from the genealogical department of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface supplied a second professional genealogical opinion by letter on November 24, 2013. Ms. La France indicated the following;

*"The information submitted by your client, Mr. John Vincent Peterson, has been carefully reviewed. It appears that even though he descends from mixed European and Aboriginal ancestry, there are no historic documents to prove beyond a doubt that his ancestors identified themselves ethno-culturally as Métis/half-breeds.*

*Interestingly, evidence found with the United States Censuses, and U.S. Native American Applications for Enrolment, suggest that this family was instead regarded as First Nations. However generally the censuses conflict with this assessment, and identify the family consistently as 'White'.*

*Furthermore, their origins being from well outside what is considered as the Historic Métis Homeland; apparently unconnected to the fur-trade; in a country that generally did not foster Métis identity; and in a time period in which Treaty systems were already being put into place; in combination with the enrolment applications, lead me to believe that the ancestors in question never saw themselves as Métis/Half-Breeds and instead may have identified as First Nations or Native Americans.*

*Factoring in this evidence, it is my professional opinion that Mr. Peterson's ancestors do **not** connect into the Historic Métis Nation as they were then known or their homeland. Of course the final decision must be made by*

*you. 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**

[11] The Senate's role is to ensure that all legislation, policies and procedures 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, the Senate has ordered a second professional opinion to assist in their review. Furthermore, the Senate will adhere to the citizenship and/or central registry appeal process highlighted in Section 6.2 of the **Senate Policies and Procedures ver. 3.2**. The Senate further understands that the onus to prove citizenship is the responsibility of the applicant, Mr. Peterson, not the respondent, the MNBC Central Registry.

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

### **Analysis**

#### **a) MNBC Policy and Procedure Adherence**

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

#### **b) Genealogical Interpretation**

[14] Both the MNBC Central Registry and the historique de Saint-Boniface indicated that they could not determine a link and/or ancestor that identified as Métis and resided within

the Métis Nation Homeland.

[15] Furthermore, while there was evidence supplied that would indicate Mr. Peterson's genealogical ancestry was connected to an aboriginal ancestor, there was not any evidence to verify a distinct ethnic connection to the Métis.

[16] The evidence supplied seems to have indicated that the family historically saw themselves as possibly connected to a possible First Nations background in the United States, as evidenced by the U.S Native American Applications for Enrolment.

[17] It was noted that while there was probable aboriginal background indicated by the documentation submitted, there was not any verifiable connection to the traditional Métis Homeland nor verifiable proof of connection to the traditions and culture of Métis communities.

[18] It was also noted that, despite the applications for First Nations enrolment, the U.S. censuses also generally identified the family consistently as white in terms of race.

[19] Based on the information supplied, testimony and the genealogical opinions (MNBC Central Registry and the *historique de Saint-Boniface*) the Senate could not identify a genealogical connection to the Métis Homeland or the presence of a Métis ancestor in Mr. Peterson's genealogy.

**c) MNBC Legislative Adherence**

[20] Mr. Peterson fails to comply with three parts of the National Definition as specified in the **MNBC Citizenship Act**. Those being;

- i) *Mr. Peterson failed to supply the appropriate documentation that proves his historic Métis Nation Ancestry.*
- ii) *Mr. Peterson failed to supply the appropriate*



*documentation that proves any Métis ancestry that connects to the Historic Métis Nation Homeland.*

*iii) Mr. Peterson failed to supply the evidence which would identify a historic Métis "distinctiveness" in his ancestry.*

## **Decision**

[21] The MNBC Senate finds in favour of the Métis Nation British Columbia's Central Registry.

[22] It ought to be noted that should the parameters for MNBC citizenship change, or if the applicant discovers new information or documentation, that this decision does not limit or negate the applicant from reapplying for MNBC citizenship.