

A4 | Wednesday, October 12, 2011

AIM activist Clarke dies in Nebraska nursing home

By Andra J. Cook
Journal staff

Theda Clarke, the former American Indian Movement activist often mentioned in connection with the 1975 murder of Annie Mae Pictou Aquash, died Saturday at a Crawford, Neb., nursing home. She was 87.

As recently as last December, Clarke claimed her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination during John Graham's felony murder trial.

Clarke's Rapid City attorney Greg Erlanson represented Clarke in the Graham case and for the federal prosecution of Vine Richard "Dickie" Marshall for the Aquash murder.

Clarke was called as a material witness for both cases, but Erlanson attempted to quash the subpoenas.

"At the time, she suffered from the advancing effects of very serious medical issues," Erlanson said. Her condition was "very frail at the time."

According to court records, the elderly Clarke was impaired because of a stroke, dementia, diabetes and other ailments.

His client was a very proud woman, Erlanson said.

"She had a good sense of humor and a strong sense of loyalty to her culture and her relatives," he said.

Erlanson said he saw a different side of Clarke than the image often portrayed in court of the activist.

Although Clarke was never charged in connection with Aquash's death, prosecutors alleged that Clarke accompanied Graham and Arlo Looking Cloud after they brought Aquash back to South Dakota from Denver.

The 30-year-old Aquash was a member of

the Mi'kmaq tribe of Nova Scotia. She was present at the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. Her body was found on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in February 1976.

According to trial transcripts, Clarke arranged to have Aquash detained in Denver and taken to Rapid City, because she was suspected of being an FBI informant. Clarke's car was used on the trip.

In the years since Aquash's death, Clarke repeatedly refused to cooperate with investigators.

Looking Cloud was convicted of Aquash's murder in 2004, but his life sentence was recently reduced to 20 years after he testified at the Marshall and Graham trials.

He testified that Clarke was present when Aquash was killed.

Clarke graduated from the St. Francis Indian School in the early 1940s, and then began a nursing career at St. Mary's School of Nursing in Kansas City.

She later worked on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. At the time of Aquash's death, Clarke owned a bar in Colorado, according to court documents.

AIM was founded in the late 1960s to protest the U.S. government's treatment of Native Americans and demand the government honor its treaties.

The group won national attention in 1973 when it took over the village of Wounded Knee, leading to a 71-day standoff with federal agents that included the exchange of gunfire.

An obituary for Theda Clarke's appears on Page A11

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Tue, Jun 15, 2021

Theda R. Clarke

PINE RIDGE — Theda R. Clarke, 87, Pine Ridge, died Saturday, Oct. 8, 2011, in Crawford, Neb.

Survivors include a son, Edward "Chip" Clarke, Gillette, Wyo.; a brother, John Nelson, Portland, Ore.; two sisters, Norma Williams, Denver, and Vivian Locust, Pine Ridge; and 10 grandchildren.

One night wake service will begin at 3 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 12, at Brother Rene Hall.

Services will be at 10 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 13, at the hall, with traditional Lakota services by Mike Carlow Jr. Burial will be at Crawford (Neb.) City Cemetery.

Sioux Funeral Home in Pine Ridge is in charge of the arrangements.

If you have questions about the Journal's obituary policy, you may call 394-8420 between 8:30 a.m. and 4 p.m., Mondays through Fridays.

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