



Cato W. Valandra

Dakota Images

Cato W. Valandra, born 30 July 1921 in the Redleaf Community on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, belonged to a distinguished family. The town of Vetala, South Dakota, was named for his grandfather, and his father, Thomas Valandra, became a tribal chairman. Young Valandra attended the He Dog School and was one of the first graduates of the high school at Saint Francis Mission. In 1943, he joined the United States Army, serving as a noncommissioned officer in the South Pacific before his discharge in 1946.

As a returning veteran, Valandra established a business in Saint Francis. In 1954, he became treasurer of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. Receiving a cardboard box full of bills and a checkbook, he promptly went to work to establish the financial controls the tribe would need to deal with the influx of federal monies and programs of the 1960s. In 1962, he was elected tribal chairman, a position he held for eight years. During his tenure, he oversaw economic development, insured that the road system was built, set up large and innovative housing programs, and established a nationwide reputation for himself. He had nearly beaten unemployment on the Rosebud reservation when he was defeated for reelection in 1969.

Valandra then returned to the business world and expanded his role in the economy of the reservation, serving as Economic Development Administration director for the tribe and administrator of the Tribal Planning Office. In 1974, he became a business development specialist and helped Indian clients with technical and management skills and the securing of loans and grants for Indian-owned businesses. He also became deputy director of the State Development Organization, was consulted by congressional committees, and returned briefly to tribal employment as business manager for the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. In 1977, he became director of the Institute of Indian Studies at the University of South Dakota, a position he held until his death in 1986. He worked closely with the tribes, specializing in small-business administration and off-reservation health care.

Valandra served on presidential commissions, the state Commission on Indian Affairs, and many other organizations. He was a great tribal member, a great public servant, and a credit to his people and his state.

by JOSEPH H. CASH

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