Alfred Wiseman (b. 1936)

In 2016, the Montana Historical Society honored Alfred Wiseman of Choteau, Montana for his outstanding contributions to Montana history and heritage. Wiseman was named a 2016 recipient of the Trustees Heritage Keeper Award.

Al Wiseman and his wife Elaine (née Gray) are Michif cultural preservationists who are members of the Michif Little Shell community of Montana. They were both born in the Métis settlement in the canyon along the South Fork of the Teton River¹ and live in Choteau, Montana. They also have a cabin on the road into the canyon.



Al Wiseman was one of a group of local Choteau citizens who felt that the famous Old North Trail in Montana along the Front Range should be marked before it totally disappeared. This trail, starting as a footpath over the years, evolved into a dog travois path, a horse travois trail, wagon trail, and in parts a gravel road and paved highway. It was one of America's first highways.

Just west of Choteau, Montana parts of this highway still sit, untouched, in much the same shape as when those First Americans traveled down it. From this main road others branch off like spines into the mountains, through the passes, and into the Westside country of the Rockies. It was in continuous use until the automobile became common place and the roads and highways moved further east onto the flat plains country.

Ancient stone cairn markers still stood in some spots, pointing the winding way through the foothills. And the actual trail made from the travois digging into the earth marked other sections. But the cairns had been torn apart by people looking for treasure under them [which they never found], and the trails were gradually fading away naturally. The committee decided to place boulders with "Old North Trail" marked on them at strategic locations along the trail in Teton County. They had also developed a

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¹ At one time pejoratively called "Breed Town" by outsiders.

map of the trail to the Canadian border. This was used by some Métis and Blackfoot people, visiting back and forth, who still traveled by wagon until the 1950s.

The Old North Trail is now marked, but to many it is just scratches in the dirt and piles of rocks. The full story of the trail and its rich bodied history needs pointing out, and for this Al Wiseman is the person to see. Al gives guided tours of the trail and accompanying sites through the Nature Conservancy's Pine Butte Preserve. These are usually free to those interested and can be short tours, or full day expeditions. Since the early people didn't just pass through the area quickly there are sites of tipis ring camps numbering in the hundreds of lodges, eagle catching pits, vision quest sites, and numerous buffalo jumps to see. The buffalo jumps [in many cases corrals rather than jumps] had been in use since prehistoric times with the last one in the area being around 1843. Piskan, in Blackfoot, was the name for these corrals, and they provided a food resource that allowed abundance in the winter months.

In addition to the Native American sites there are those of the Métis settlers. These are the people who had slipped into the nearby foothills to avoid the U.S. government forced removal to Canada in 1883. They used those many canyons just as the early travelers on the trail did. They were ideal places to escape enemies, and not be found.

In 2009 the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management put up an interpretive panel commemorating the Métis Settlement and Old North Trail. The following is their report of the event.

New Interpretive Panel Highlights Métis

by Ann Bouchers, Montana State Office, and Rod Sanders, Lewistown Field Office

Nearly 70 people listened appreciatively to the smooth, sweet sounds of a fiddle and a guitar drifting up through the trees. It was a fitting close to a National Public Lands Day event at the Ear Mountain interpretive site along the rugged Rocky Mountain Front 25 miles west of Choteau.

The July 31 gathering began with a few maintenance projects before moving on to the day's biggest attraction: the dedication of a newly installed interpretive panel about the Métis ("MAY-tee" or "may-TEE") Indians.



Al Wiseman, Jim Fox and Vince Fox close out the ceremony dedicating a new interpretive sign about the Métis. Photo by Benjamin Miller

The Métis, a distinctive group of mixed blood French/Scottish and Indian people, evolved during the 17th century French/Canadian fur trade era. Their ancestral homeland -- then known as "Rupert's Land" – was a large area which drains into Hudson Bay, including what is now known as the Red River Valley of North Dakota and Minnesota.

In the 1870s, many of the Métis moved into Montana due to conflicts with European and Canadian immigrants, and eventually made their homes in some of the secluded canyons along the Rocky Mountain

Front. Until about 1920, there was a thriving Métis village near the Ear Mountain site.

Rod Sanders, outdoor recreation planner for the Lewistown Field Office, researched information for the new panel. Several people contributed to and reviewed his work, including Christi Belcourt, an Ontario, Canada, Métis artist whose work is featured on the state-of-the-art (high pressure laminate) sign. Historical photographs were provided by the Louis Riel Institute in Winnipeg, Manitoba. John Lemieux from the BLM National Sign Center in Rawlins, Wyo., designed the layout of the panel with guidance from Rod Sanders and MSO's interpretive specialist, Ruth Miller. The result is an attractive, informative synopsis of the Métis culture.

The dedication ceremony included remarks from Willy Frank, Lewistown Assistant Field Manager; Richard Hopkins, manager of the First Peoples Buffalo Jump near Great Falls and BLM Great Falls Field Station Manager when the trail and kiosk were constructed; Al Wiseman, a Métis descendant who lives nearby; and Rod Sanders. Jim Fox and son Vince of Harlem closed the ceremony with traditional Métis music on the guitar and fiddle.

Several others also deserve credit, including Zane Fulbright, Lewistown FO archeologist, for securing the funding for the new panel; and Sandra Padilla for organizing the NPLD project itself. Other Lewistown BLM contributors were Stan Benes, Mona Driskell, Benjamin Miller, Lori Montgomery, and Abel Guevara.

The South Fork of the Teton River was home to over 100 Métis, many are buried in the cemetery of the old community. The Wiseman's maintain the Métis Cemetery in the old Canyon Community where they were born in Teton County, northwest of Choteau near South Fork of Teton River on land which is now owned by the Nature Conservancy. The surnames found in this cemetery are Bruno, Collins, Fellers, Gray, Larance, Parenteau, St. Germaine, and Talipson.

Al Wiseman is the son of Cecelia Larance (b.1915) and Albert Dale Wiseman. His Métis grandparents on the maternal side are James Julien Larance (b.1881) and Mabel Clementine Fellers. Clementine was the daughter of Franklin Fellers² and Harriet June Gray. Harriet was the sister of James Gray who was the father of Métis political leader, lawyer and rights activist Raymond Francis Gray (1900-1961). Their parents were Michel Gray (1843-1904) and Caroline Campion (1837-1923).

Al's great-grandfather was Basile Larance (b. 1860) and his great-grandmother was Madeleine Campion.

Elaine Wiseman is the daughter of Marie Carriere (1927-2012) an Alfred Gray. Her maternal grandparents were William John Carriere (b.1885) and Flora Azure (b. 1887).

³ Flora Azure was the daughter of Francois Azure (b. 1862) and Emma LaRance (b. 1862). Emma LaRance was the daughter of Basile LaRance (b. 1831) and Marguerite Desjardins (b. 1837).

² Born 1874 at Dupuyer, Montana. Franklin's parents were Adolphe Fellers born 1837 in France and Emilie Gariepy born August 31, 1855 at St. Francois Xavier.



Cemetery maintained by Al and Elaine Wiseman of Choteau (Photo by Ralph Thornton)

The Wisemans were also involved in the development of the Choteau Museum and nearby Michif house furnished in Métis traditional style. Métis Elder Al Wiseman is also an archivist of Michif fiddle tunes.





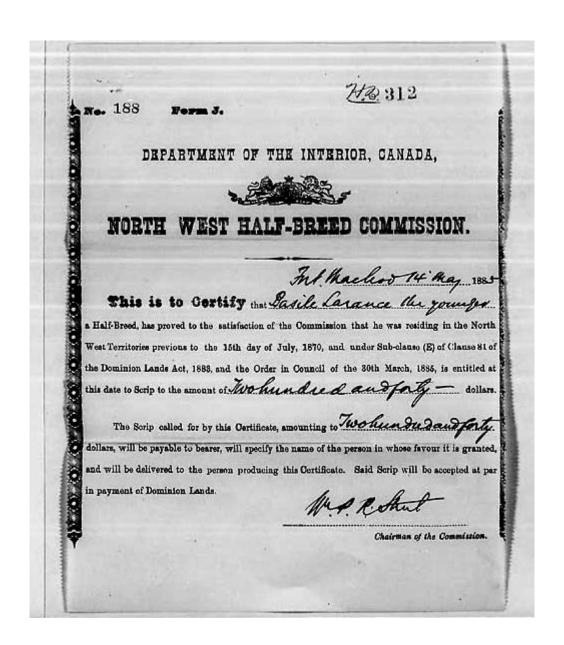
Michif House

Scrip:

Larance Jr., Basile - Concerning his claim as a child - Address, Fort McLeod - Born, 1860 at St. Vital - Father, Basile Larance Sr., (Métis) - Mother, Marguerite Desjardins, (Métis) - Married, 1878 at McLeod to Madeleine Campion - Children living, two, Marie Rose born 1880 and Julien born 1882 - Children deceased, one, died unchristened - Scrip for \$240 - Claim 265.

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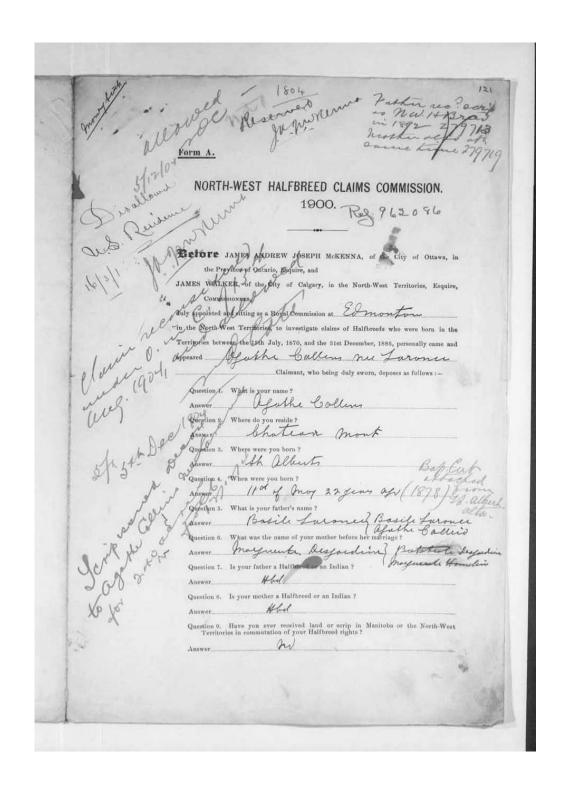
	35. Can you produce haptismal certificates of the birth of your shilldren? If so, produce them, if not, state reasons?
	15. Of those dead can you produce burial certificates? If so, please produce there, if cod, state why not.
	II. Have you ever had a homestead entry t. Alabel. 1-2-
	11. If so, what became of it?. 🗸
	12. Have you ever had any land claims in Manitoba or the North-West? If so, state nature of them, when and how acquired and, what
	disposal did you make of them 1
	22. What do you counider the value of all your property, land, implements, building, horses, calife, &c. ?. It that he had a little of the fill of the land of the Half-lived rights? District of the land or serie in Manifolms in communication of the Half-lived rights?
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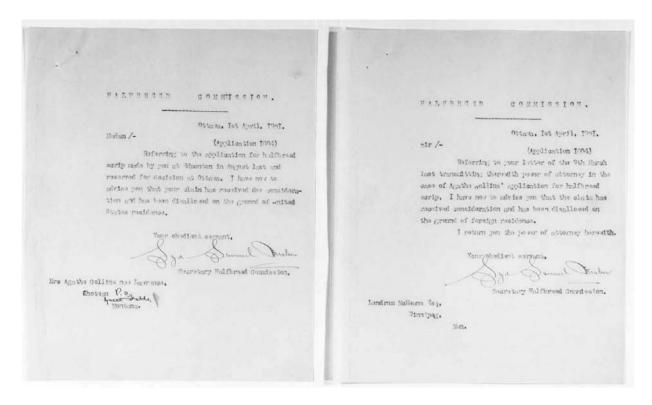
Larance, Julienne - Concerning her claim as a child - Address, St. Albert - Born, 1866 at St. Albert - Father, Basile Larance, (Métis) - Mother, Marguerite Desjardins, (Métis) - Scrip for \$240 - Claim 833.

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MORTH	WEST HALF-BREED COMMISSION.
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West Territories previous	us to the 15th day of July, 1870, and under Sub-clause (E) of Clause 81 of
the Dominion Lands &	ct, 1888, and the Order in Council of the 80th March, 1885, is entitled at
this date to Scrip to the	e amount of 240 dollars
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dellar mill be a ti	d for by this Certificate, amounting to 240 to bearer, will specify the name of the person in whose favour it is granted, to the person producing this Certificate. Said Scrip will be accepted at par in Lands. A. J. L. L. Chairman of the Commission.
and will be delivered to	to bearer, will specify the name of the person in whose favour it is granted,
in payment of Dominton	o the person producing this Certificate. Said Scrip will be accepted at par
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	Chairman of the Commission.

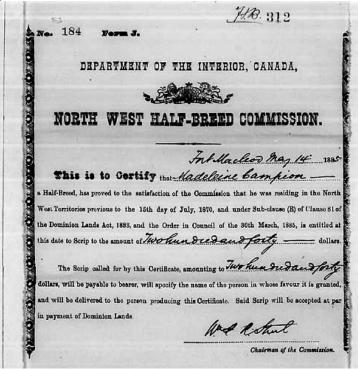
Collins, Agathe; address: Chateau, Montana; claim no. 1804; born: 11 May, 1878 at St. Albert; father: Basile Larance (Métis); mother: Marguerite Desjardins (Métis); file ref. 962086.



Question 10 Are you a member of any Indian Band? Answer Ov . my Jother and mother receive such in Lithbudge, I was living in monton mine or ten gives before. The rebellion I was just from sohen I went there and have live there row since I come how a gear ago last July and am going back to mouton this fall Thebet 4 is cutificale of my latheren And further deponent sayeth not. West Territories on the 24 day or Dujust A. D. 1900. Witne Form No. 151.



Campion, Madeleine - Concerning her claim as a child - Address, Fort McLeod - Born, St. Albert, North West Territories, 1860 - Father, William Campion, (Métis) - Mother, Philoméne, (Métis) - Married, 1878 at Fort McLeod to Basile Larance - Children living, two, Marie Rose born 1880 and Julien born 1882 - Children deceased, one, died 1884, not named - Scrip for \$240 - Claim 269.



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14. Give dates of birth	and death of these who died t Asker	dud tash Klar	y you have	7
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Perm Xe. 142.				

Gray, Christina; address: Choteau, Montana; claim no. 1386; born: 14, June, 1881 at St. Mary's; father: Michel Gray (Métis); mother: Caroline Campion (Métis); scrip cert.: form C, no. 898.

Appendix: Census

EXCERPT FROM 1900 CENSUS Cree or Chippewa/Métis in Choteau Township Teton County Montana

NAME RELATION AGE TRIBE YEAR OF IMMIGRATION

BRASS, Rosalie Boarder 11 Cree 1891

JOCCO, Pete Head 28 Cree 1877

MILLER?, Angelique Mother 51 1877

MILLER?, Jacob Father 70 Cree 1877

MILLER?, Barnie Brother 25 Cree

MILLER?, Johnie Brother 23 Cree

MILLER?, Albert Brother 22 Cree

ROSETT, Joe Head 34 Cree 1883, Jenne Wife 33 Cree 1877, Eliza Daughter 13 Cree MT, Johnie Son 9

Cree MT, Isabella Daughter 7 Cree MT, Frank Son 1 Cree MT

LARANCE, Bazil Head 38 Cree 1881, Julian Son 18 Cree MT

GUARDAPEE, Joe Head 45 Cree Naturalized

GUARDAPEE, Sarah Wife 35 Cree -

GUARDAPEE, Eli Son 23 Cree MT

GUARDEPEE, Julien Son 21 Cree MT

GRAY, Cecitia Daughter 18 Cree MT

FELLERS, Louis Head 29 Cree MT, Elizabeth Wife 23 Cree MT

DEMURRAY, John Head 22 Cree 1889, Olive Wife 20 Cree MT, Emma Daughter 1 Cree MT, Julian Son 9/12 Cree MT

HAMILIN, Sivers Head 50 Chippewa 1885

HAMILIN. - Wife 55 Cree

HAMILIN, Lorman? Son 17 Cree

SWAN, Batise Head 35 Chippewa 1882, Julia Wife 25 Chippewa, Rosa Daughter 10 Chippewa MT, Runie Daughter 5 Chippewa MT

BASSETT, - Head 54 Cree MT

-, Amab Mother 90 Piegan MT

BELCORE, Alex Head 26 Cree 1890, Mary R. Wife 22 Cree MT, Ursla Daughter 10/12 Cree MT

GREY, Joe Head 30 Cree 1890

GREY, Caroline Wife 48 Cree 1880

GRAY, Jas Son in law 26 Cree 1892

GRAY, ALBERT Grandson 2 Cree MT

GUARDIPEE, Joe Son 13 Cree MT

GREY, Florence Daughter 10 Cree MT

GREY, Mary A. Daughter 5 Cree MT

GREY, Melvina Daughter 3 Cree MT

GARDINER, Pete Head 75 Cree 1882, Rosalie Wife 65 Cree, Frazine Daughter 20 Cree

LAPEYRE, Pascel Head 35 Cree 1872

LAPEYRE, Mary Ann Wife 34 Cree 1872

LAPEYRE, Cecelia Daughter 6 Cree MT

LAPEYRE, John Head 49 Cree 1872

LAPEYRE, Mary Wife 47 Cree 1872

LAPEYRE, James Boarder 33 Cree MINN

HAMLIN, Joe Head 25 Cree 1890

HAMLIN, Della Wife 19 Cree MT

LARANCE, Jackson Head 38 Cree 1880, Eliza Wife 29 Cree 1887, Grigway Son 11 Cree MT, Josaphine

Daughter 9 Cree MT, Ursla Daughter 7 Cree MT, Gertie Daughter 5 Cree MT, Eva Daughter 3 Cree MT,

Dolman Daughter 5/12 Cree MT

ST. GERMAIN, Milner Sister in law 27 Cree 1890

LARANCE, Bazil Head 75 Cree 1876

LARANCE, Maggie Wife 60 Cree 1876

NADO, Frank Head 48 Cree 1888, Emma Wife 29 Cree 1876, Frank Son 5 Cree MT, Louis Son 3 Cree

MT, Henry Son 4/12 Cree MT

CARR, Joe Head 30 Cree MT, Marian Wife 24 Cree MT, Pearl Daughter 4 Cree MT, Arthur Son 2 Cree MT



Compiled and Edited by Lawrence Barkwell Coordinator of Métis Heritage and History Research Louis Riel Institute