

Gariepy (Guardipee), Eli “Isinamakan” (1857-1942)

Elie Gariepy was born on May 31, 1857 at Turtle Mountain, the son of Jean Baptiste Gariepy (b. 1832) and Judith Cardinal. Elie is a grandson of Louis Gariepy (b. 1771) and Josephte Ducharme, a St. François Xavier Métis family.¹ Elie married Antonia Kataitsipitsaki, the daughter of Matusohn and Auetsipiaki on December 5, 1885 at Badger Creek Agency, St. Peter’s Mission, Montana. He was subsequently married to Sadimina, “Sadie.” They lived on the Pikuni Blackfoot reserve in Teton County, Montana. Eli was a tall blue-eyed Michif man. His Blackfoot name was “Takes Gun Ahead.” In the 1800 census, he is shown living at North Bank, Upper Teton River, Choteau, with wife Mary Guardipee, sons John and unnamed Guardipee. In the 1904 census, he is shown as: Eli L Guardipee / male / Head / age 47 / listed with wife Sadie Guardipee, sons Frank, Charles, and William Joseph Guardipee, daughters Josephine, Louise, and Agnes Guardipee. In the 1910, census he is living at Blackfeet Indian Reservation, Teton County, with wife Sadie Guardipee, daughters Louisa and Agnes Guardipee, and son William Guardipee.

James Willard Schultz describes Eli in his book “My Life as an Indian”:

The Pikunis and a few lodges of Bloods arrived soon after we completed the post, and came, too, one who was to become and always remain a close friend of mine, Eli Guardipee, named by the Pikunis Isinamakan, "Takes Gun Ahead." He was of that family for which so many places in the north are named, as, for instance, the Guardipee Crossing of Bow River. He was but a year older than I; tall, slender, very intelligent, kind of heart, brave to a fault; and the most successful hunter, the surest shot that I have ever known.



Isinamakan, at centre.

(# 159, James W. Schultz Photograph Collection, Montana State University)

In 1878, Elie and the other Métis buffalo hunters at Cypress Hills wrote a petition asking for a special Métis reserve of land.² Elie’s older brother Leonide “Can-da-we-

¹ Louis Gariepy was a voyageur with the North West Company (1804, 1811-1820) and the Hudson’s Bay Company (1821-1824). In 1824, he retired to St. François Xavier where he worked as a blacksmith.

² Requesting a re-opening of the buffalo hunt between November 14th and February 15th each year and the granting of Métis “reserve” land (A strip of land 150 miles long along the American border beginning where the Pembina River crosses the border. This strip was to be fifty miles from south to north.

cam-chi” (b. 1852) also signed this petition. He lived with Chief Rocky Boy’s group. They also signed the petition for a Métis reserve in Montana, sent by Louis Riel to General Nelson A. Miles, August 6, 1880.

Eli Guardipee's Narrative³:

I was born May 31, 1857, in one of the half-breed settlements in the Turtle Mountains in what is now North Dakota. The coming of the white man had driven out almost all of the big game farther westward and the streams had been trapped until there was but little fur to be taken any more. In fact, it had become so that the breed settlements practically all moved westward for their meat supply as soon as spring came, and returned to their homes in the Turtle Mountains for the winter...

As the years moved by the game retreated farther west until it finally became so that it took most of the year to go out in the Red River carts, kill and cure a sufficient supply of meat to last during the winter. It seems that it never occurred to those happy, dancing, simple-minded people to move out and live where there was game.

Every year they trudged over the vast trackless plains to get meat, loaded their carts with meat and robes during the summer and fall, then returned to the Turtle Mountains for the winter, ate their supply of meat and repeated the performance again next year.

In the late summer of 1867, one Tom Lavatta [who had lived with his Indian wife and family with Johnny Grant at Deer Lodge] came to the Turtle Mountain country with a herd of horses being driven to the Red River country in Manitoba. These horses numbering about 150 head, were somewhat larger than the breed cayuses and were sold to the farmers on Red River. ...Tom Lavatta wintered in the Red River country in 1867-68 and was ready to return to Montana in the spring of 1868.

My father, Baptiste Guardipee, was the son of a French father and a Shoshone woman. My own mother was a Chippewa woman. Lavatta told my father about Montana and in particular he told him of the vast herds of buffalos and other big game in the plains country and of the fine land and pleasant places to live in the Deer Lodge Valley country. He made the picture so attractive that a number of the Turtle Mountain half-breed families resolved to leave their old home and come out to the land where there was so much good hunting and that was so much better than the place where they then lived.

Ten families, using about 30 Red River carts, came with him. There were about 50 people, men, women and children. This was probably the first organized Red River cart caravan to migrate to Montana for the purpose of establishing

³ “Eli Guardipee Reminiscence, 1940” as told to John B. Rich, September 27, 1940, Montana Historical Society, SC772, 1-10.

permanent homes within the territory [there are other examples]. The journey first started with a great company of half-breeds, something like 400 other carts besides my father's group were coming west to hunt...

We saw many Sioux Indians on the way...but our party was so large and so well armed that they did not offer to molest us. ... When the Milk River country was reached another great camp of breeds was found somewhere in the vicinity of where Dodson is now, and our party stopped there a couple of weeks to visit and hunt with these people. [This is close to Cree Crossing and near the Milk River.]

It was truly a happy life that these people were living. The camp was in the midst of the buffalo herds and they hunted and worked hard during the day but when night came they danced and sang the old French songs, until the late hours, arranged for many and divers horse races for the following day, then slept the sleep of people who had no cares for the moment.

After our visit with the big camp had ended Lavatta and the 10 families coming to make their home in Montana left the main camp and proceeded toward Fort Benton, following the Milk River valley to about where Havre now is. Grass was plenty, buffalo were so numerous that the whole country was, as the Indians say, 'one robe.' The lakes and streams offered a bountiful supply of good water. We reached Fort Benton in September, 1868, and from there five of our families went on to Deer Lodge with Tom Lavatta, the other five including my father's family, elected to stop at Fort Benton. At this time Fort Benton was the biggest and busiest trading post in the plains region west of Fort Union. It was the trading point for practically all of the Blackfeet Indians.

Benton had grown to be more than a trading post. It had become a distributing point for all the country to the north, even far up into Canada. ... My father's family and the others of our original party remained at Fort Benton about three weeks, then went to the Goose Bill, a tributary of the Marias River, to the north...we moved back to Fort Benton for a while. This was in October, 1868. He and his friends...concluded to go again to the Marias and on this trip three more families accompanied them. ... They all went north as far as the mouth of Medicine Rock Coulee where Shelby, Montana, is now. Upon leaving Medicine Rock Coulee they found that I. G. Baker and Company were building a fort and trading post, the first fort and trading post to be built on the upper Marias. ... Here we met the famous scout, Peter Cadotte, and another man. ... [a] big wagon train came along and we followed them up to the [fort at] Four Persons [about three miles up the Teton River from Choteau, Montana] ... My father and his friends, Alexis Guardipee, Adolph Fellers, Michel Vivieau and Alexander Guardipee, remained to look after the Fort [west of Choteau, Montana] ...

Peter Cadotte, commonly known as Cadotte, the Scout, came up from Fort Benton and lived with us that winter of 1869-70. Cadotte...was a French half-breed. ...

He was greatly liked by all the plainsmen, whites and breeds, and no man amongst these latter was quite so popular amongst the Blackfeet Indians. ...

Among the well-known plainsmen I met here when I was a boy was Alexis La Bompard [Alexis La Bombarde]⁴ ... He wore his hair long and usually dressed in buckskins. ... I lived with my father until I grew to manhood. We lived in camps and hunted. Game was so plentiful that it was an easy way to live ... [at] the fort at Four Persons.



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⁴ Alexis Labombarde (b. 1803): In 1835, Alexis married Nancy Kipling the daughter of John Ram Kipling and Margaret Okanese. She spent most of her life around Fort Union and the Cypress Hills. She was first married to Michel Gravelle and then married Alexis Labombarde. Her daughter Domtildie Gravelle was married to Jean Baptiste Dumont at Batoche. Alexis and Nancy lived along the Upper Missouri River where he worked as a guide, hunter, and interpreter for the Sioux and Blackfoot. The American fur company posts at Fort Union and Fort Pierre employed him as a labourer as well. Both Alexis and Nancy were employed by Denig at Fort Union (1852). He worked as an interpreter for the John James Audubon Expedition, and also worked as an interpreter for the Blackfoot agency in Montana. Elie Garipey recalls that he was “a large dark man [who] wore his hair long and usually dressed in buckskin.”