

Judith (Wilkie) Berger. (b. c. 1825)

The first permanent settlers of Spring Creek, now Lewistown, Montana, were Métis. The Métis established Lewiston in 1879. Pierre “Kitikaniapnatch” Berger¹ (b. 1816) and his wife Judith Wilkie are credited with being the founders of Lewistown. Berger, along with his wife Judith Wilkie Berger, their sons Isadore, Isaie, Jean-Baptiste, and Jacques, along with some 25 other families made the trek into the Lewistown area in 1879. Francis Janeaux came with the second group. Janeaux founded the first public schoolhouse in 1883. This date is considered the official “founding” of Lewistown.

Judith Wilkie was the daughter of Jean-Baptiste Wilkie (b. 1803) and Amable Élise (Annabelle) Azure (b. 1808). Some of her noteworthy siblings were: Alexandre Wilkie (b. 1831) married to Louise Gariépy; Betsey Wilkie (b. 1836) married to Antoine Fleury; Madeleine Wilkie (b. 1837) married to Gabriel Dumont; and Antoine Wilkie (b. 1847) married to Esther Gladu.

On August 6, 1880, Louis Riel petitioned for a Métis reserve in Montana in a letter sent to General Nelson A. Miles. Martha Foster has pointed out that many of the signatories were members of the Spring Creek Métis Band. “(Many) had settled on Spring Creek the summer before. Other signatories were their friends and relatives, most of who eventually settled to the north in the Milk River/Havre/Zortman area, or to the west at St. Peter’s Mission near the present-day Cascade and along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains.”² A number of family patriarchs led this group, namely; François Amyotte Sr. (b. 1819), Pierre Berger Sr. (b. 1816), William Davis Sr. (b. 1824), Louis Gariépy (b. 1828), Salomon Hamelin (b. 1810), and Pierre Laverdure (b. 1819).

Signing the Riel petition for a Montana Reserve were Pierre Berger Sr. and his brother-in-law Alexandre Wilkie as well as the sons of Pierre Berger and Judith Wilkie: Bernard Berger, Isaie-François, Isidore, Jacques, Jean-Baptiste, and Pierre Jr.

Children of Judith Wilkie and Pierre Berger:

- Pierre, born circa 1841 or 42 at Red River.
- Isaie, born November 8, 1844, married Clemence Gourneau, the daughter of the daughter of Turtle Mountain Chief Joseph Gourneau and Judith Delorme.
- Isidore, born 1846, married Domitilde Laframboise, the daughter of Joseph Laframboise and Marie-Anne Cadotte.
- Jean-Baptiste, born circa 1849, married Betsy Keplin, the daughter of Paul “Pishk” Keplin and Marguerite Gourneau.

¹ The son of Jacques Berger (Bergis) and Marie Cecile Dumont. The children of Cecile Dumont and Jacques Berger were Pierre (b. 1816) and Louise Berger who married Henry Munroe Fisher then married Jean-Baptiste Patenaude. Cecile subsequently married Joseph Laframboise (b. 1823) and then Joseph Desmarais. Pierre was band member # 148 on the Pembina Annuity Roll, Way ke ge ke zick’s Band, in 1868.

² Martha Foster, *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006: 96.

- Jacques, born October 17, 1851, married Philomene Ouellette, the daughter of Isidore Ouellette and Marie Bottineau.
- Amable Azure, born March 7, 1853.
- Bernard, born June 13, 1855, married Caroline Depousse (Laprose), the daughter of Thomas Laprose.
- Marie, born May 10, 1857, married François Azure, the son of Antoine Azure Victoire Larivière, then married Pierre Graveline, the son of Pierre Graveline and Victoire Girard.
- Adèle, born 1859 at Pembina, married Vital Turcotte the son of Jean-Baptiste Turcotte and Angélique Pacquin.
- Catherine³, born circa 1862, married William Laframboise the son of François Laframboise and Marie Trottier. She then married Modeste Rocheleau, the son of Jean-Baptiste Rocheleau and Marie-Anne Carrière. Modeste, [born at St. Norbert on February 18, 1854] and his brother of Jean-Baptiste were members of Captain Corbet Flamant's company, one of the 19 *dizaines* led by Gabriel Dumont during the 1885 Métis Resistance. After the 1885 Resistance, Modeste moved south to Montana. He then married Catherine Berger, the daughter of Pierre Berger and Judith Wilkie at Lewistown, Montana on August 22, 1886.

Pierre Berger, the son of Jacques Berger and Cécile Dumont, was born in Red River Settlement and, in 1845, moved to Pembina (North Dakota). Pierre married Judith Wilkie, the daughter of Jean-Baptiste Wilkie and Amable Azure. Pierre, Judith, and three of their children applied for land as Pembina Half-Breeds under the 1854 treaty with the Lake Superior and Mississippi Chippewa. Nine years later, under a treaty with the Chippewa of Red Lake and Pembina (1863-1864), the US government issued Pierre and his son, Pierre Jr., scrip, again as Pembina Half-Breeds. Later in the 1860s, Pierre, Judith, and their family, as well as Judith's brother's family (Alexandre Wilkie) were hunting on the Milk River. When the US government and reservation agents pushed the Métis out of the Milk River area, Pierre led a group of families to Spring Creek in the Judith Basin of Montana where they founded the town of Lewistown.⁴ The Bergers applied for homestead land in 1883. Their cabin was located three miles east of the trader's establishments along what was later called "Upper Breed Creek." Pierre and his brother-in-law Alexandre Wilkie held the church services in their homes.

Elizabeth Swan gives the following account:⁵

³ Berger, Catherine (Rocheleau)(b. 1864) Spouse, Modeste Rocheleau dit Vivier (b. 1854)

Catherine's husband Modeste was born at St. Norbert on February 18, 1854. Modeste was a member of Captain Corbet Flamant's company, one of the 19 *dizaines* led by Gabriel Dumont during the 1885 Métis Resistance. The Provisional Council minutes of April 16, 1885 show an order for Solomon Boucher, Modeste Rocheleau and François Vermette to go and hunt up men, arms and ammunition as far as the McIntosh farm and its neighborhood.

⁴ See Martha Harroun Foster, "'We Know Who We Are': Multiethnic Identity in a Montana Métis Community" (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2000, and Martha Foster, *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006:

⁵ Elizabeth Swan, "A Brief History of the First Catholic Pioneers of Lewistown, Montana," file. 541, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, and in the Joseph Kinsey

Along the Milk River between Harlem and Chinook, Montana, was a large settlement of Red River Half-Breeds, as they were known at the time, who had come from the Red River Country of North Dakota, and Canada, following the buffalo trails, at the same time in search of a permanent location, which after a sojourn of eight years or so their livelihood was diminishing fast. Then they began to think seriously about their future knowing they could not their way of life forever. After some discussion they began to break up into groups. Some went back to North Dakota and Canada and to different points of Montana.

Pierre Berger and his family of eleven children were amongst the settlement. One of these children, a daughter⁶, and her husband Frank Azure, and the Gladeau families, with others went to St. Peter's Mission, Montana, where the elder Azures were already located.

Mr. Berger had been thinking, then he made up his mind to tell his relatives and friends how he was very much interested and anxious to come further west to look for a certain locality he had heard about from an Indian friend, where there was an abundance of wild game, and other good chances of good prospects. He had also been directed as near as possible to the location. Consequently, it was considered a good idea for him to go. A Band of about (25) twenty-five families, including the Bergers agreed to follow Pierre Berger to his new adventure. The children who accompanied their parents were Peter, Barney, Catherine and Frances. The married children with their families were Isaie, Isidore, Jake and John B. Berger. Mrs. 'Adele' Vital Turcotte and Mrs. Amable Frank Ouelette; Alexander Wilkie and Antoine Fleury two brothers-in-law of Pierre Berger. Their friends, Benjamine Kline⁷, the Lafountains, Doneys, Fayants, Turcottes, Ledoux Gayions and Mrs Laquoit, an elderly widow known to all as Old Ellen.

It is noteworthy that after the 1885 Resistance Gabriel Dumont temporarily settled three miles east of Lewistown with his wife's brother, Alexandre Wilkie and his wife's sister Judith Wilkie Berger.

A note on Alexandre Wilkie. (b. ca. 1831)

Howard Papers, MC 27, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana. Elizabeth Swan was a granddaughter of Pierre Berger and Judith Wilkie.

⁶ Marie Berger, b. 1857, married François Azure on January 29, 1878 at Milk River.

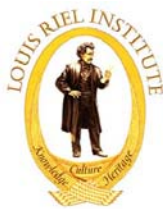
⁷ Benjamin Klyne. (1847-1932)

Ben Kline was born on October 13, 1847 at what is now known as Fort Totten, near Mni Wakan (now called Devil's Lake), North Dakota. His father Michel Klyne Jr. was born in 1811 at Edmonton, a Half-Breed descendent of Michel Klyne Sr. and Suzanne Lafrance a Métisse. His mother was Madeleine Millet dit Beauchemin, whose father was a French Canadien, Andre Millet dit Beauchemin who had married a Half-Breed Crow woman Charlotte Pelletier. Benjamin's parents moved to Pembina from Red River in the late 1840s. On August 6, 1880, he signed Louis Riel's petition to Major General Nelson Miles requesting land for the Montana Métis.

Alexandre, the son of Jean-Baptiste Wilkie and Amable Azure, Alexandre Wilkie married Louise Gardepie (Gariépy). He applied for land under the 1854 Chippewa Treaty, and, by the 1870s was hunting on the Milk River. With members of his extended family, Alexandre moved the Judith Basin in 1879. A year later, he signed Louis Riel's petition to Major General Nelson Miles requesting land for the Montana Métis.

In the company of his sister's (Judith Berger) and daughters' (LaFountains) families, Alexander Wilkie travelled with the first Métis to settle near Spring Creek and found what would become Lewistown, Montana (1879). His two-room cabin was the largest in the area, having one room that measured twenty by thirty feet. This was quite a luxurious size for that place and time, but Wilkie planned ahead, knowing that the families would need a large room in which visiting missionaries could conduct services. A fiddler and singer, he had learned liturgical music in Pembina and Saint Boniface. In his new home, he organized a church choir, which sang the old hymns in French or "Cree" (probably Michif). Visiting priests, discouraged by what they considered to be depraved behavior in lively trading towns such as Ft. Benton and Carroll, were pleased to find an orderly and welcoming community in Lewistown.

In 1886 Alexander Wilkie, with a party of friends and relatives, moved back to Belcourt, Dakota Territory. to be with his aging parents and to take part in negotiations for the proposed Turtle Mountain reservation. Alexander, like his father Métis leader Jean-Baptiste Wilkie, was concerned about Métis rights to land that they had hunted on for generations. He believed that he could not effectively fight for the recognition of Turtle Mountain aboriginal land rights from Montana. (See: Martha Harroun Foster, "We Know Who We Are': Multiethnic Identity in a Montana Métis Community" (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2000).



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